COMMUNICATION IN BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY

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WILLIAM M. SCHUTTE
ERWIN R. STEINBERG
Carnegie Institute of Technology

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For

LESTER M. BEATTIE

and

ELLIOTT DUNLAP SMITH

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PREFACE

This volume is designed to meet the needs of businessmen and of those who wish to prepare themselves for a business career. As consultants in communication we have been engaged for some years in isolating the problems which cause the businessman to write and speak less effectively than he should and in identifying the skills which he needs in order to do both well. It is with these problems and skills that this book is concerned.

Our study of communication—in the business office, in the industrial plant, and in the classroom—has convinced us that only if a person works his way to an understanding of certain fundamental principles of communication and makes them his own, will he be able to write or speak well. A detailed knowledge of rules of punctuation, grammar, spelling, and the like is useful, to be sure. But it can only supplement—it cannot replace—the ability to apply basic principles effectively.

The chapters which follow, therefore, deal with fundamental matters, not peripheral ones. There is little discussion of formal grammar, and grammatical terms are used only where they are essential. In practice we have found that ability to cite rules of grammar has little to do with how well an individual writes or speaks. (Although our clients sometimes tell us that they have trouble with "grammar," what they almost always mean is that they need help with problems of style.) There is no discussion of spelling. For the minority who have serious difficulty with this problem, a special program is required. There is no discussion of the various forms which are used in business and industry. The man on the job knows which ones are required, and the student will not profit by learning to use a set of forms inevitably quite different from those he will find in the company

he joins. It is on the basic principles which the individual must acquire if he is to communicate forcefully and efficiently that this book concentrates.

Most of the material in the first eleven chapters has been drawn from written rather than oral communication, largely because writing is the more pressing problem for most businessmen. However, we should emphasize that the principles discussed in these chapters are equally applicable to speaking, as we show in Chapters 16 and 17.

Indeed, these principles are essential to all effective communication. Partly to give the reader the opportunity to see how the same principles operate in other areas and partly to provide variety and contrast, we have drawn the Illustrative Materials at the end of each chapter from a wide range of sources. Thus the reader will be able to make significant comparisons with the exclusively business materials in the text and the Materials for Revision and so increase his understanding of the basic principles and the skills they entail. If he achieves real understanding, he will be well on the way to developing the powers of communication so essential to a successful career in the business world.

During the past decade we have been privileged to confer with many hundreds of businessmen about their writing and speaking. Each of them has made some contribution to our thinking about the communication problems of business and industry; and to each we are most grateful both for the warm welcome they have always given us and for the privilege of learning from them as much as we taught. We have a special word of thanks for Thomas F. Fogarty and Jules H. Steinberg, who supplied valuable material; for Robert L. Woodward and John E. Goetz, each of whom read a chapter for us and provided very useful comments; and for H. C. McDaniel, who has helped us in so many different ways that we dare not try to list them all.

In this volume there are many examples of business writing. Although each example in the text originated in the world of business and industry, we have changed all names, often to protect the guilty. We have also altered the names of products and provided fictitious addresses for nonexistent companies. The use of this device—also used occasionally in the Illustrative Materials—is justified, we feel, by the freedom it has given us to use a wide range of materials which could not be used if real names were attached.

We should like to record here, too, our debt to a number of our friends on the campus of Carnegie Institute of Technology. Elliott Dunlap Smith,

Glen U. Cleeton, Margaret F. LeClair, and Austin Wright have given us both aid and encouragement in this and many other undertakings. Several of our colleagues—John A. Hart, Robert C. Slack, Earle R. Swank, Richard A. Wells, and Neal Woodruff, Jr.—have worked with us as consultants. We have learned much from our collaboration with them in this capacity, and we are grateful for the ideas and materials which they have provided for us. Mary T. Scarlott and Sally L. Rowley of Carnegie's library reference staff have been most helpful in securing materials for us.

To several individuals we are especially grateful, for they have contributed much to make this a successful venture. Lester M. Beattie read the text and called our attention to many stylistic blunders. Florence K. Milligan not only typed much of the text for us but also managed to retain her good humor in the midst of occasional chaos. And finally, each of us is grateful for the patience and forbearance of his wife and children.

W.M.S.
E.R.S.

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
January 16, 1960

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COMMUNICATION IN BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY

1. The Climate of Business

The growth of American business and the advances of American technology during the recent past are so remarkable that they would have astonished our ancestors. And though familiarity has made us less likely to marvel at the wonders of our time, nevertheless we find ourselves now and then shocked out of our blasé acceptance of miracles by some particularly spectacular accomplishment of science or industry. This is the age, too, of achievement in communication. A newsman interviews a tribal chief in the heart of Africa one morning; the next day several million families not only hear his words but see him speak as they watch their television sets. When a Presidential candidate is nominated, the public knows about it before most of the men and women on the floor of the convention who do the nominating.

This is also an age of increasing paperwork. From every business establishment pours a steady stream of letters, memoranda, reports, news releases, advertising material. Each year the pile of mail in every office mounts. Each year the businessman must make more of his decisions on the basis of the written matter on his desk, less on what he finds out in face-to-face conference with his employees, his suppliers, his competitors. As the pile of written material grows, he must spend less time on each individual communication.

The Growing Complexity of Communication

It is not surprising, therefore, that a major concern in executive and management-training programs today is communications: public speaking, group conference techniques, letter writing, report writing; public relations, employee relations, customer relations. The common denominator for all is the effective use of language. The increasing concern with communication reflects the increasing complexity of business and industry. At the turn of the century, when many of our concerns were founded, they were one-man organizations. A Henry Ford or E. T. Weir could keep within his view all of the various aspects of his business. It was only a few steps from the front office to the plant. Today, however, the "front office" is likely to be in New York, Pittsburgh, Detroit, Chicago, or Los Angeles; the plants in Houston, Jersey City, New Orleans, or Kansas City. Furthermore, suppliers and customers may be even more widely dispersed, since even modest businesses frequently need raw materials from all over the world. Distance, however, is not the only problem.

Even when the home office and the plant are physically close, an engineer developing a new process may well be as "far" from top management, who must decide whether to invest in the process, as if he were a thousand miles away. He has to put his findings in writing so that all interested individuals and departments can examine them, discuss them, and make the required decisions. Even if he could explain them personally to everyone involved, he would still have to write a report which his associates could turn to if they forgot what he told them, which technical writers could use in writing a manual, which development or marketing experts could have available when determining costs, which would enable an almost endless number of people to perform the daily miracle of turning words on paper into shoes, or steel, or butter, or cloth, or airplanes.

The Importance of Written Communication

Letters, memos, and reports, therefore, are important for a number of reasons. They inform and record in a way that the spoken word cannot. Industry would be as helpless without them as without machinery or fuel.

With increasing competition a company cannot afford to put up with inadequate equipment or costly power. Industry invests millions of dollars every year to improve machines and fuels. In recent years industry and government have been attempting to improve their communications. And records show that their efforts have paid. The Hoover report states that for every $1000 the federal government has spent on correspondence management, it has saved $32,000 in net operating expense. Although in 1953 Mutual Of New York employees wrote 24 percent more insurance than in 1943, a letter-writing program enabled them to cut the number of letters written by 10,000, and reduced greatly the length of those they did send out. Altogether the company saved an estimated $85,000 a year for ten years. The complexity of business, vigorous competition, the continuing demand for increased production and a better product, customer insistence on speed and service, the importance of good internal and public relations—all of these factors and many more have increased the need for *efficient* communication.

A board of directors or operating committee, with many important decisions to make, does not have time to decipher or untangle complicated, wordy reports. It must have the necessary information in a form as efficient as possible. Similarly, specifications or orders for the production line must be concise and readable; if they are not, production lags in direct proportion to the time it takes to interpret them. Sales orders and reports must be complete and to the point. Inadequate reporting leads to overflowing warehouses, orders returned to the factory, freight cars stacked up on sidings, extra correspondence, and mounting bills for long-distance phone calls as a harried sales manager tries to find out exactly how the customer wants his material shipped or to whom an order should be billed. Installation and maintenance manuals must be simple and understandable. If manuals are too technical or not detailed enough, equipment may be installed improperly, with predictable results—breakdowns or inefficient operation. Reports on research must be written so that the general manager, who probably is not an engineer but an accountant (or a lawyer, or an advertising man) can understand them. If they are full of terminology and concepts that he cannot understand, he will not be able to recommend appropriate action to the board of directors or operating committee. Consumer inquiries, complaints, and suggestions pour into business establishments; each requires a tactful reply which will satisfy the customer. And direct-mail sales letters must be vigorous and effective if they are to do their job.

The Cost of Inefficient Letters and Reports

An inefficient letter or report costs money in a dozen different ways. It takes too long to write or dictate. It takes too long to transcribe and type. It takes too long to read and unravel. But even efficient business letters are far more costly than we like to think. The National Archives and Record Service of the General Services Administration has recently estimated that a typical half-page letter dictated to a stenographer costs in salaries alone between $0.70 and $2.45; machine dictation reduces the cost only slightly, to $0.60 and $2.25. The total annual cost to business is probably close to $5 billion a year. These figures, of course, cover only the cost of the letters up to the time they are put in the mail. If we add the cost of *inefficient* letters—letters which require further letters of clarification or letters which lose a sale or a customer because they are tedious or rude—the $5 billion would be multiplied many fold. And if to that figure we add the cost of producing reports and the further, but hidden, cost of inefficient reports, the total will begin to rival that of the gross national product of many countries in the world.

Oral Communication

The ability to communicate orally is equally important. Today the businessman, scientist, or engineer frequently finds himself standing before an audience or participating in a conference. The impression that he makes when he speaks has an important bearing on his future. If he is well prepared, poised, and sensible, he will be remembered favorably. If he fumbles for ideas, seems ill at ease, and speaks erratically, he will leave a poor impression. An ineffective speaker does a disservice not only to himself but also to his company, of which he is a visible representative.

Increased Interest in Better Communication

Fortunately, management at all levels is becoming sensitive both to the waste involved in inefficient communication and to the importance of proficiency in the communication skills. Hence it is looking very carefully at these skills in evaluating the potential of its employees.

Paradoxically men who themselves tend to feel that writing is a secondary part of their job are usually judged by their superiors largely on the basis of what they do write. One major corporation tells its engineers in a technical report manual:

> An experienced engineer recognizes the value of a well-organized report. It is often his only tangible product. It represents his investigation, his testing and experimentation. If his efforts are to count in the judgment of his supervisors, he must describe clearly what he has done. He must show the significance of his work. And often the engineer's written report is his only contact with management. This factor takes on added importance as the size and complexity of the organization increase.

Communication Skill and the Individual's Career

Letter, memo, and report writers often fail to recognize the significance of the point made in the last two sentences of this statement. For many of them, promotion and the opportunity to grow in professional capacity depend ultimately on a man whom they seldom or never see. To him, a man under consideration for promotion or a raise is often little more than a name at the bottom of reports that cross his desk periodically. If those reports are clear, efficient, and usable, the executive, whether he is conscious of it or not, will form a good impression of the writer. But if they are poorly organized, wordy, clogged with unnecessary details or with technical terms and concepts that he cannot understand, he will form, perhaps quite unconsciously, a poor impression of the writer. Many a capable engineer has been denied a promotion or a raise—or both—without either the person making the decision or the engineer himself knowing quite why. In many a case, the engineer's reports were the cause.

Since management is becoming more and more aware of the importance of good letter and report writing and of good speaking, the individual's need to write and speak well is even greater. If he is being considered for a position of increased responsibility, management can seldom give him time to improve. If he cannot write and speak well when the position opens, it will probably be filled by someone else. As communication consultants, we too often hear stories about the "very capable" engineer whose work was never recognized because he could not communicate his results and make clear the importance of what he had done; the salesman

who was not promoted to sales manager because as soon as he was removed from direct contact with his customers and had to write to them, he ceased to be an asset and became a liability; the young department head who became general manager of a profitable division, only to watch his excellent plans come to naught because he could not communicate adequately with his most capable subordinates and so was denied their coordinated strength and wisdom. These stories come to us from management. Increasingly, top management is insisting on the ability to communicate, not only from those who aspire to its ranks, but at all levels.

There are, consequently, more and more books, articles, programs, and manuals on letter and report writing, more "readability formulas" and "fog counts" of all kinds. Such diverse organizations as the Johns-Manville Corporation, the Chrysler Corporation, the National Association of Manufacturers, the Royal Bank of Canada, Mutual Of New York, the Air Materiel Command of the United States Air Force, and the Federal Supply Service of the federal government have published communication manuals or pamphlets of some kind for their employees.

Changing Habit Patterns

With all of this interest in communication, one may well wonder why our problems are not quickly solved. Is the problem of inefficient language any different from that of inefficient design of automobile engines? Why shouldn't industry solve it as rapidly and efficiently as industry solves its other problems? There are many reasons.

√ Probably the most important is that we are touchy about our ability to use our own language. We resent any suggestion that our writing is inadequate. Psychologists say that language is very personal, that it is "a projection of one's self." No one likes to have a red (or blue) pencil taken to his writing or to be told that his grammar is wrong, that a particular comma should be a semicolon, or that he should not use slang. The extent to which many people are embarrassed by these difficulties is suggested by the way they react when introduced to an English teacher: "Oh, you teach English, do you? I'd better watch my language." This half-guilty, half-resentful attitude toward language and language specialists is a major hurdle for anyone who attempts to improve the quality of communication in business.

Both the guilt and the resentment may be well founded. Having heard often enough about standards of linguistic propriety and having learned just enough to know that he probably violates them, a person feels that he is somehow at fault. On the other hand, because the standards are so often presented as inflexible and arbitrary prescriptions, unrelated to practice, few people are adequately motivated to learn them and comply with them.

Those who think of instruction in "grammar" and in writing as consisting of instruction in outdated, unrealistic, picayune rules for the proper placing of conjunctions and prepositions naturally look askance at any attempt to improve their work. After all, they have used language for twenty or thirty or even fifty years and have "gotten along"; they have argued with their parents over the family car (and generally gotten it), they have graduated from high school and perhaps college, they have proposed marriage and been accepted. They have applied for a job, bought their clothes, asked or given information about how to get to Broadway and Twenty-third Street. And they have almost always managed to get results. As far as they can see, their conjunctions and their prepositions seldom, if ever, have kept them from being understood.

A second reason why business and industrial writing is difficult to improve is the way the young employee is introduced to his job. There is nothing sacred, he soon learns, about current methods of production or merchandising. If he can develop better ones, he knows he will be rewarded. His suggestions are sought, and he is offered bonuses for workable improvements. But when it comes to writing, an entirely different attitude prevails.

Typically today, a young man in industry will break in under a man of 55 or 60 who probably began his own training in the 1930s under a man who started out at the turn of the century. This sequence suggests why the language of a young man in industry today sometimes reminds us of the high, starched collar. In effect, only one business generation separates him from that period, and we still find occasionally in his letters such quaint phrasing as "Yours of the fourteenth instant received" and "I beg to remain, Yours sincerely." For the same reason, too many people still write "Enclosed herewith please find" when all they mean is "Enclosed are" and refer to "this writer" or "the undersigned" because they think that using "I" is immodest.

In contrast to his thorough introduction to production methods, the young man today is seldom given instruction in how to write. His only recourse, therefore, is to go to the files for copies of the boss's letters and to try to imitate them. After all, a letter in the style favored by the boss can

hardly get him in trouble. And if it does sound a bit pompous—well, nobody is likely to notice. Thus a lack of positive instruction and a temptation to follow bad models combine to discourage the young writer from developing an effective style of his own.

Some companies do include an hour or two on communication in the training programs they run for new employees. The average person, however, will get little help from these sessions—even if he wants help. A man does not learn to write by listening to a lecture or two. To break an old habit pattern, he must continue to work over a period of time to build a new one. An exposure to facile prescriptions and snappy maxims, or even submersion in them for a morning or a full day, may convince him that he has a lot to learn; but it is no substitute for sustained effort, for the opportunity to take part with his co-workers in group discussion of writing problems, for discovering himself what is wrong with certain kinds of writing, and for arriving at the solutions to the various problems himself—all, of course, under proper guidance.

A final stumbling block is that sometimes a man or a company which recognizes the problem and attempts to solve it correctly expects results too quickly. A man of 40 has been building and reinforcing his writing habits for fifteen or twenty years. In a few months only the unusual person can break long-standing habits and substitute new ones. How many people resisted automatic transmission in automobiles solely because they were suspicious of a device which, though it was much easier to operate, required a frustrating habit change? Why should we not expect even greater uneasiness about changing habit patterns in using language, and greater difficulty in making the adjustment?

We are always confused, frustrated, and irritated at any attempt to make us think through a habit pattern that we have been using automatically: explaining and demonstrating how to put on a bow tie, for example; or singing only the third line of "The Star Spangled Banner"; or reciting only the closing line of the pledge of allegiance. We share this quality with the well-known arthropod:

> **The centipede was happy quite,**
> **Until a frog in fun**
> **Said, "Pray, which foot comes after which?"**
> **That worked her mind to such a pitch**
> **She lay distracted in a ditch**
> **Considering how to run.**

Most men and women are similarly distracted by any question which forces them to be self-conscious about their writing habits. Many a businessman

complains to us when he comes to the second or third of a series of weekly group conferences: "These sessions are killing me. This week while I was dictating, I got to worrying so much about how I was going to say things that I made a mess of every letter I wrote." His reaction is perfectly normal, as we tell him. It is a symptom of progress. And invariably after a few more sessions the man finds that he has developed new habit patterns and once again feels at ease. Such individuals must be guided and supported through their "distracted" period until they are secure in new and more efficient patterns.

As these paragraphs have suggested, to write and speak well requires hard work. The proverbial sayings "Anything worth doing is worth doing well" and "You can't get something for nothing" both apply to the improvement of the communication skills. Catch phrases and magic formulas may inspire a brief flurry of enthusiasm for "doing something" about one's writing and speaking. But unless the individual is willing to follow up good intentions with solid work, the results will be negligible. The reader of this book who works conscientiously over the materials we have provided and thoughtfully studies our discussion of communication problems should be well on his way to becoming a confident, effective craftsman, capable not merely of solving the specific problems covered in this book, but of bringing to the solution of any writing or speaking problem an instrument which he has fully mastered and can use with maximum effect.

Illustrative Materials

1

The fundamental principles of good writing are not new. Here, writing in The World's Work *over fifty years ago, an anonymous contributor makes several telling points, some of which we have touched on in this chapter, some of which we shall consider in other chapters.**

About Good Business Letters

A business man's stationery tells something and sometimes tells much about him. A country storekeeper often uses cheap paper, emblazoned with

* From *The World's Work*, November 1907, p. 9602.

a glaring letterhead in two or three colors, telling all the things that he sells; but a big firm that does fifty times as much business is more likely to have only a small letterhead, with a simple line in black type giving only the firm's name and address. The difference is in dignity and self-confidence. The quality of the paper used is very well worthy of attention. Then, a bad typewriter can spoil the best possible letter by a misspelled word, by incorrect punctuation, by bad spacing, or by ragged alignment. Such slovenliness produces the suspicion of like indifference in the execution of business. A neat, accurate page is a strong indication of care and of pride in doing a workmanlike job.

Of more significance than its physical appearance is, of course, the wording of a letter. The writer's personality shows through his words. One man's letters convey an impression of a strong character, judicious, businesslike. Another man's letters are hurried, and full of repetitions, conveying the impression of lack of judgment and of a compact mental habit. Clear expression is the result of clear thinking; and clear thinking is the basis of business success. Thus, when a man resolves that no poor letter shall ever leave his office, he resolves also that he will develop his judgment by giving enough thought to his ideas to make them clear to himself.

A good business letter is never commonplace, because a sound business judgment is not commonplace, for it involves interesting and important consequences. But when you read "Your favor has been received and contents duly noted," it is hard to believe that a real man, or a man of any originality is behind that letter. A more silly vacuity was never written. Translated into common sense, it means this: "I received your letter of such a date, or I would not now be answering it. Having got your letter, I read it." Foolish, isn't it? But millions of moments of time and millions of drops of ink have been wasted on that silly and monotonous sentence.

A good letter does not contain repetitions. "Saying the same thing again in a different way" does not emphasize an idea: it only confuses it.

Again, a good letter is courteous. Courtesy makes friends. Much of it may seem to be wasted on some people but a firm that insists on unusual courtesy in all its correspondence will find instances of its value in places where it least expected appreciation of it.

A good business letter has individuality: it conveys some of the winning or successful or dominant qualities of the writer that would make him pleasant to know or successful in business. To do this, it must contain the freshness and vigor that come from clear thought on its subject, and it must

show that the writer had the particular recipient in mind when he wrote. If he does not, the reader will get no lively sense of personal dealing with an agreeable man.

These impressions are of great importance. For instance, one large mail-order house, whose entire business is dependent on the effectiveness of its correspondence, figures out to the fraction of one percent the relative value of two letters soliciting business for the same thing at the same price. They find that one letter brings returns and another does not.

A magazine publisher in New York owed his success in getting renewals of many contracts for a certain class of advertising to one sentence, run as a postscript to his letters. The sentence was merely a courteous reminder. The letters that contained this postscript proved conclusively their greater value over the letters that did not.

A business letter betrays to the discerning reader whether the writer takes a genuine personal interest in his business—whether he really cares for it, or is doing it only in a perfunctory way; and every reader is far more discerning than the careless business man thinks. A man shows his character by his correspondence.

2

A few years before the article in The World's Work *was published, Charles M. Schwab wrote a letter to Henry C. Frick.* How many of the criteria for a good business letter discussed in the article does Mr. Schwab's letter illustrate? How many does it violate?*

MY DEAR MR. FRICK:

You ask me to give my views as to the probable future earnings of the Carnegie Interests, and as to the proposed reorganization on a basis of $100,000,000 Bonds—$250,000,000 preferred stock and $275,000,000 common stock.

Permit me to say that commencing in 1879 as Engineer, constructing the works, ten years as General Superintendent of our principal works and over two years as President, I feel that I know the properties and their possibilities as well, or better than any one in or out of the concern.

While we have been highly successful in the past, as every one knows, I believe we are only now getting in shape to be truly successful and truly

* From James Howard Bridge, *The Inside Story of the Carnegie Steel Company: A Romance of Millions* (New York: Aldine Book, 1903), pp. 312–314.

profitable. Our April profit and loss sheet shows earnings slightly over $1,500,000.00 with rails netting us only $17.50 and billets $16.00. Lowest prices we ever had on an average were $16.50 for rails and $14.50 for billets, so you see we have reaped very little of the advantages of increased prices. With prices anywhere near to-day's selling prices we would easily make over $3,000,000.00 per month, and then our new works to be started in two months will, I estimate on present prices, bring us an additional profit of $600,000.00 per month or total of $3,600,000.00 per month.

As to the future even on low prices, I am most sanguine. I know positively that England cannot produce pig iron at actual cost for less than $11.50 per ton, even allowing no profit on raw materials, and cannot put pig iron into a rail with their most efficient works for less than $7.50 per ton. This would make rails at net cost to them of $19.00. We can sell at this price and ship abroad so as to net us $16.00 at works for foreign business, nearly as good as home business has been. What is true of rails is equally true of other steel products. As a result of this we are going to control the steel business of the world.

You know we can make rails for less than $12.00 per ton, leaving a nice margin on foreign business. Besides this, foreign costs are going to increase year by year because they have not the raw materials, while ours is going to decrease. The result of all this is that we will be able to sell our surplus abroad, run our works full all the time, and get the best practice and costs in this way.

As to the works, any competitor will tell you that we are far ahead of any one, and, if the plans which we have for the future, are carried out we will be farther ahead than ever. I have no fears for the earnings in the future. I believe they will much exceed any estimate we have made, provided, however, that the same methods of organization and operation as now exist, are fully carried out in the future.

It must not be run as other concerns are run, but as it is now conducted. This is most important. I believe the earnings will fully justify the capitalization and as a proof of my belief in this, I am quite willing to take every dollar I own in the stock of the new concern on the basis proposed.

Very truly yours,

C. M. SCHWAB
President.

3

Here is another letter written in the same period. How many of The World's Work's *criteria for good business letters does it illustrate? How many does it violate?*

T. L. Smith, Esq.
Treas. Benson Steel Company
Thomasville, West Virginia

Dear Sir:

I have received from you this morning, your valued favor of 25th inst. relative to the movement of ore, which, you state, is to be manufactured, at the Paul Benson Steel Works, or the Calder Furnace, into Pig Iron for your use, and, in reply, permit me to state that the rates on ore from the Lakes, which, I presume, is the ore you refer to, are fixed by the representatives of our carriers west of Pittsburgh and I have, therefore, referred your letter to Wm. Stewart, Esq. of the Atkinson Standard Railroad, who is well known to you, with request that he reply.

Yours very truly,

JOHN S. WATSON

4

In 1952 Peter F. Drucker wrote for Fortune *a "suggested commencement address" called "How to Be an Employee" in which he talked about what a graduate should expect if he decides to go into business and what college should do to prepare him for his career. Here is a brief excerpt.**

The first question we might ask is: what can you learn in college that will help you in being an employee? The schools teach a great many things of value to the future accountant, the future doctor, the future electrician. Do they also teach anything of value to the future employee? The answer is: "Yes—they teach the one thing that is perhaps most valuable for the future employee to know. But very few students bother to learn it."

* Reprinted from the May 1952 issue of *Fortune* Magazine (p. 126) by special per mission; Copyright 1950 by Time Inc.

This one basic skill is the ability to organize and express ideas in writing and speaking.

As an employee you work with and through other people. This means that your success as an employee—and I am talking here of much more than getting promoted—will depend on your ability to communicate with people and to present your own thoughts and ideas to them so they will both understand what you are driving at and be persuaded. The letter, the report or memorandum, the ten-minute spoken "presentation" to a committee are basic tools of the employee.

If you work as a soda jerker you will, of course, not need much skill in expressing yourself to be effective. If you work on a machine your ability to express yourself will be of little importance. But as soon as you move one step up from the bottom, your effectiveness depends on your ability to reach others through the spoken or the written word. And the further away your job is from manual work, the larger the organization of which you are an employee, the more important it will be that you know how to convey your thoughts in writing or speaking. In the very large organization, whether it is the government, the large business corporation, or the Army, this ability to express oneself is perhaps the most important of all the skills a man can possess.

5

In its issue of December 3, 1952, TIG Brief, *a publication of the United States Air Force, emphasized one hidden communication cost:*

It Costs to Write

Cold figures, like a good picture, speak louder than words.

It has been estimated that records created by the Air Force during one year cost approximately $500,000,000. This amount does not include the cost for manpower, space, equipment, and supplies for records maintenance; nor the amount spent for filing cabinets!

Every phase of Air Force operations involves some paper work. The initial cost of a sheet of paper is multiplied many times from the moment

it leaves the stock room until it reaches its final destination, for we must add to the cost of the paper itself, the time of the people who: compose its contents, edit, type, and reproduce it, handle, read, and file it.

One Air Force Major Air Commander put it this way:

> $24,160.00. That's what it costs if 90,600 command employees spend only ten minutes of their working time reading a four-page directive. This is a modest estimate. It takes ten minutes to read and understand even one page of some of our gobble-de-gook writing.

90,600	Employees (entire command)
× 10	Minutes (each employee's reading time)
906,000	Total number of minutes used by all employees to read a four-page directive.
906,000	Minutes—15,100 hours
15,100	Hours
× $1.60	Average hourly pay rate
$24,160.00	Worth of employee time used to read four-page directive.

Add to this what it costs to write, edit, print, and distribute a directive! . . .

These cold facts and figures leave us but one alternative: to think before we write. Not only must we attempt to be sure of what we write, but also that it is written so that it will be understood. Each piece of paper sent out must pay its way!

6

Study this memorandum:

TO: J. P. McNally
Manager, Cardwell Plant

Please refer to our invoice number 65/8761, November 15, 1958. This invoice ~~as dated~~ covers one shipment of High Grade Alcohol to Atlanta, Georgia, in car 4Z 279, as specified.

The Chemical Division has called to our ~~urgent~~ attention ~~by recent memorandum~~ that they had claimed credit for 4013 gallons of High Grade Alcohol in this car.

On our invoice number 65/356 dated February 1, covering High Grade Alcohol, as specified, in car 11Z 847 to Richmond, Virginia, they reported a shortage of 311 gallons and stated that they never got credit for same.

To date they claim they have never received credit covering the shortages which I have described above. I am unable to locate in this office credit memorandums covering these shortages, and no one here recalls having processed any.

Please check your files and determine if the Chemical Division ever advised you in writing of shortages on these two cars. Also determine if you have ever issued credit for these shortages.

If you find that the Chemical Division has so informed you of these shortages and no action has been taken by you to adjust the shortage, please do so by issuing credit memorandums immediately so that the situation will be terminated.

JOHN WILLIS

a. *How well does this memorandum communicate?*

b. *Did it cost the company which employed John Willis more than it needed to?*

c. *Can you do the job more economically than Willis did? Try rewriting the memorandum.*

2. Considering The Audience

Case Study: A Costly Letter

The Genung Manufacturing Company specializes in the production of custom-built laboratory equipment. Though small, it has built up a thriving business by providing special service at reasonable rates. On April 1, 1956, Genung received an order for a specially designed cooling system to be used in the laboratory of the Short Beach Chemical Company of New York. The laboratory, then under construction, was to be in operation by July 1. Genung was able to fill the order by June 25 and shipped it on that date to the Short Beach Chemical Company. It arrived on June 30 and was eventually paid for. At that point Genung considered the transaction completed.

However, some months later, on March 1, 1957, Fred Peters of the order service department at Genung received a letter from the Short Beach Chemical Company saying that a prolonged strike had prevented their completing the laboratory by the expected date and that as a result the equipment designed by Genung had not been uncrated until February 15, 1957. After it had been installed, the thermostat assembly was found not to be in working condition. Short Beach Chemical stated that although they should have inspected the equipment when it arrived at the site of the laboratory, they had not done so. Under the circumstances the only logical

course seemed to be to return the thermostat assembly for reconditioning. Would Genung examine it, they asked, and quote a price for the repairs? Since Genung had not built the thermostat but had obtained it from the Thompson Industrial Equipment Company, Fred Peters referred the matter to Thompson. Thompson reported that the assembly was so severely damaged that repair would be impractical.

This was the situation when Fred Peters, having received the letter from the Thompson Industrial Equipment Company, dictated this reply:

April 15, 1957

Mr. Thomas W. Crosby
Short Beach Chemical Company
376 Fosdick Avenue
New York 94, New York

Dear Mr. Crosby:

With reference to your letter of April 1 in which you inquired as to the approximate cost for reconditioning the thermostat assembly supplied with your order No. A-626 for a specially designed cooling system for the Short Beach Chemical Company Laboratory, we have contacted the factory from which we obtained the assembly and they advise that they do not wish to have anything to do with repairing it, due to the fact that it is not practical and the expense would be exceedingly high. Therefore, since it was not our thermostat assembly and is not repairable, we also do not wish to have anything more to do with it. It is being returned to you this date.

Thank you.

Very truly yours,

FRED PETERS
GENUNG MANUFACTURING COMPANY

There was no reply to Peters' letter, and the correspondence went to the files. Over a year later, on May 21, 1958, Tom Parsons, a salesman for Genung, made a routine call at the Short Beach Chemical Company Laboratory in New York. Here is his call report:

> I unsuspectingly walked into this place and mentioned Genung and was almost forcibly ejected. Paul Mason, who is director of the Short Beach Lab, has hanging on his wall a thermostat assembly which Short Beach apparently obtained with a special cooling system from us. The assembly is there to remind them never to place another order with Genung.

Please refer to our Order No. 76112 of 1956. You are probably familiar with the history of this order, but I'll recapitulate the sequence of events as obtained from their correspondence files. The cooling system and thermostat assembly were ordered before their lab was completed. There was some holdup which resulted in their failing to uncrate the system and the thermostat until February 15, 1957. At that time it was found to be defective. Evidently the thermostat assembly was extensively damaged and the reconditioning charge would be high. Up to this point everything is fine. The customer realizes he was in error in not inspecting the equipment sooner, and is prepared to pay the penalty. His only hope is to salvage what he can, and he requests a definite price for the repair. He then receives a letter from Peters dated April 15, 1957, telling them to take their thermostat and go to hell, not quite in those words but essentially to that effect. That did it as far as they were concerned. It was no longer a question of the thermostat but the fact that we refused even to discuss it that gave them the slow burn.

I suppose at this point you're asking yourself why Tom Parsons is bothering to exhume a corpse that's been buried for over a year on an account that probably doesn't give us the price of the thermostat assembly in profit in a year's time. This is the situation. The Short Beach Chemical Lab is only one, and the smallest, of several labs which are affiliated with the Marvin Chemical Corporation. Our total potential sales for the group probably run around twenty thousand dollars a year. This incident has jeopardized the entire account. It goes even beyond that. We have other substantial accounts in this area which are in constant contact with each other, and the word spreads fast. The Marvin Chemical Corporation plans to build two additional laboratories and both will be under the supervision of Paul Mason. Mason has this incident firmly impressed upon his mind, as the thermostat assembly hanging in his office would suggest, and under the circumstances I doubt whether we would receive any consideration for an order. On the other hand, this would appear to be an opportune time psychologically to apologize for Fred Peters' letter and offer some sort of adjustment. Even if the thermostat were a total loss, which I doubt, it would probably be worth the cost just to get it out of Mason's office, where it is collecting dust and is a constant reminder. On the other hand, we might obtain a substantial part of Marvin Chemical's business in our field, which would probably more than compensate for any loss we would suffer.

Fred Peters—who incidentally had left Genung by the time the salesman's call report came in—jeopardized a significant portion of the Genung Manufacturing Company's business by writing one letter. Fred was a

pleasant fellow and a loyal employee. He would have been shocked had he known the effect his letter had produced. How did he happen to stir up this hornet's nest? The problem of the thermostat assembly probably struck him as routine. Short Beach Chemical had asked him a question, he had found the answer, and he gave it to them. But the result was just as devastating as if he had intended to sabotage his company.

Perhaps Fred Peters was in a bad mood that morning when he wrote the letter. Perhaps he had had an argument with his wife over the discipline of his children. Or perhaps one of his neighbors had dented a fender of his car the night before. Fred may even have been in a good mood when he sat down to dictate. Perhaps he was in a mood to say, "The heck with everything. Let's get this job done and get on to something interesting." Whatever his situation, one thing he clearly did not do: He did not ask himself, "How does Mr. Crosby feel about this whole transaction?" He did not put himself in Mr. Crosby's place and ask himself, "Given Mr. Crosby's attitude, what kind of letter will provide him with the information he wants and do the most to promote good relations between our companies?"

This story has a happy ending. The head of the order service department took the salesman's suggestion and wrote an effective letter to Tom Crosby:

Dear Mr. Crosby:

I have just learned of an old incident, which we seem to have handled very poorly, concerning your Order No. A-626 for a special cooling system and the No. 76-26 thermostat assembly which you returned for repairs in March 1957.

The thermostat was not one of our own make and had to be sent back to the Thompson Industrial Equipment Company for the necessary inspection and repair. They stated that the thermostat was badly corroded and that the repair cost would be quite expensive and out of proportion. This information was relayed to you by a person who is no longer with our organization in a manner which we feel was very unsatisfactory. The situation has not changed. The thermostat assembly is of no value to the manufacturer or to us. However, we do feel somewhat responsible since the thermostat was purchased through us, and we are therefore enclosing our credit No. 21622 for $100.00, covering what we believe should be a satisfactory salvage value. It will not be necessary for you to return the thermostat in order to claim this salvage value; if you can secure any additional amount elsewhere for it, we hope you will do so.

We trust that you will accept the enclosed credit for $100 as a

satisfactory settlement of this incident and would appreciate hearing from you at your convenience. After all, we certainly do not wish to have a single blunder on our part interfere with the fine relationship which Short Beach and Genung have built up over the years.

If there is anything else I can do to straighten out this situation, please be sure to let me know.

Sincerely yours,

THOMAS L. SMITH
GENUNG MANUFACTURING COMPANY

Smith's letter is not a model of tact and persuasion. (One might argue that he should not have mentioned that Peters was "no longer with our organization" and that he might have offered the $100 in a more graceful way; one might also quarrel with such phrases as "which we seem to have handled very poorly," "The situation has not changed," "somewhat responsible," and "a single blunder on our part.") But Smith approached his job forthrightly, took into account the anger and annoyance of his reader, and was able to convince Tom Crosby and Paul Mason that they need no longer feel insulted but should accept the incident as "just one of those unfortunate things" that will happen in business now and then. Mr. Crosby's reply was cordial, and the relationship between the Short Beach Chemical Company and the Genung Manufacturing Company returned to its original, mutually satisfactory state.

Misleading Phrasing

Words, as every businessman finds out, are tricky. If a letter or report writer does not keep a careful eye on them, they may sneak around and stab him in the back. Danger lurks even in what may seem like a simple writing situation. Take the letter of congratulations, for example. Here is a sentence from such a letter: "Your promotion is well deserved, and I know that you will provide the kind of leadership the company needs in the Marketing Division." Is this a "good" sentence? It would be appropriate in a letter from the executive vice president of a company to a man who had been appointed a division manager. As it happened, we found it in a letter written by a junior executive, a man in his middle twenties, to the new man-

ager of the marketing division of his company. The manager felt, understandably, that the junior executive's presumption was almost insulting. "Who does Jones think he is," the older man must have growled, "to tell me that *he* knows I'll provide good leadership?" But being an understanding and intelligent man, he quickly realized that young Jones was really trying to be complimentary, to indicate his admiration for his superior; nevertheless, the manager said to us, it was a long time before he could look at Jones with complete objectivity and a still longer time before he came to feel that he could rely on his judgment.

Once again we have a failure by a writer to put himself in the place of his reader. After he had drafted his letter, Jones should have said to himself, "Suppose I am Mr. Smith. This letter has reached my desk from a very junior executive in the marketing division. What does the letter sound like to me as manager?" Had he asked this question, Jones would have realized his mistake and phrased his sentence so as to remove the presumptuous implications.

The Danger in Stock Phrases

Part of Jones's blunder was his unthinking reliance on stock phrases which he had taken from other letters of congratulations. One might expect that a young man in business, simply because he has not been exposed to such stock phrases as long, would be less tempted to use them than someone who had been in the business world for a long time. Unfortunately this expectation is not borne out. In an article called "The Language of Business" in their issue of November 1950, the editors of *Fortune* report that the less established a man is in a business organization, the more likely he is to depend on jargon.

Here is another letter in which the use of stock phrasing gets the writer into difficulties:

> Dear Joe:
>
> I hear through the grapevine that you have been appointed to the position of purchasing agent following the resignation of our good friend Jim Collins. I am not familiar with the details of his resignation. Nonetheless I would like to extend to you every wish for success in a most difficult assignment, which I am sure you will master.

Since the writer and Joe are on the same general level in the business hierarchy, this letter is not presumptuous. But it is highly—and even insultingly—insinuating. "I hear through the grapevine" suggests immediately that something is not quite legitimate. Why does the writer have to hear about Joe's promotion through the grapevine? Most such appointments are made public and one wonders if there is a special reason why his company felt it necessary not to publicize Joe's. Toward the end of the same sentence there is a reference to "our good friend Jim Collins," whom Joe has replaced. The phrase "our good friend" followed by a proper name has come during this century to have mildly unfavorable connotations in certain contexts. It refers sometimes to people who should be good friends, but are not, people not of the type with whom we choose to associate if we can avoid them. Thus the writer has implied that Jim Collins is a man for whom he has no respect. He follows with "I am not familiar with the details of his resignation. . . ." The implication here is clearly that the details are not altogether savory. "Nonetheless I would like to extend to you every wish for success." "Nonetheless" following the preceding sentence suggests strongly that "Dear Joe" has done his dirty best to get Jim Collins thrown out of his job—and has succeeded.

The man who wrote this letter intended to do no more than congratulate his friend Joe and wish him well. His error, like Jones's, lay in his reliance on phrases drawn from the stock of standard jargon available to writers of informal business communications. Even individually, they were not innocuous; and apparently the writer never considered what they might mean after he had put them together.

Considering the Reader

Few of us are unaware of the reader. Up to a point we all realize that we are writing to somebody, that our letters and reports do not exist in a vacuum. Not many businessmen, however, have thought through clearly the implications of the reader-writer relationship; still fewer have trained themselves to take that relationship into account intelligently and unfailingly in every communication they produce.

Not a few seem to accept in some degree the view that if you want to give your correspondent information, or make a recommendation, or tell him that you cannot fill his order, "Why you just put it down there in black

and white, and if he's got any brains he'll know what you're talking about." In theory, this approach is fine; in practice, it can cause havoc. The company that sends its customers a letter saying "Effective July 1, this company will service its installations without charge only during the first 90 days after their purchase" will be getting its message across. But if its customers have been accustomed for years to free servicing for the first 12 months, they are going to be very unhappy about a curt note which tells them in effect: "This is what we're doing. If you don't like it, you know what you can do."

To be sure, few executives would let a note of this type be sent to all of a company's customers. But we have seen many equally curt and offensive notes sent to an individual company by a sales representative or even by a sales manager. Witness the letter written by Fred Peters of the Genung Manufacturing Company.

Perhaps the most important cause of failure in business communication is the failure to remember that a human being will receive each communication—and to write accordingly. People get letters from "companies," but no "company" opens and reads a letter: each letter is read by an individual, or perhaps a group of individuals. They are human beings, and they do not like being slapped in the face. If they are slapped, they react in a very human way: they retaliate by placing future orders with a company that has the decency both to explain why it must change its service policy and to suggest that it wishes the change did not have to be made. The man who writes as if the reader were a robot should not expect his letters to be received cordially. On the other hand, a touch of warmth and good humor or a little bit of straight talk will sometimes do wonders. We remember, for example, Tom Kelly, who was conducting a minor negotiation with a man he knew slightly, in another company in the same city. Despite the relative insignificance of the problem, the negotiation bogged down in details. Letter after letter passed between the two men—and others who were drawn in. What had looked like a routine matter to be straightened out in a week dragged on and on for months. The pile of correspondence grew higher and higher. Finally Kelly took his file on the case, by now over an inch thick, put a blank sheet of paper on top, and printed in large letters: "DEAR BOB: ISN'T THIS GETTING OUT OF HAND? *Tom Kelly.*" Then he sent the whole file over to Bob. Within two days the matter was settled and both men could turn to more important matters. Mr. Kelly had gotten action by dramatizing good humoredly the futility and waste of the long negotiations over a minor problem. He got results.

Case Study: A Letter Writer Who Gets Results

Another man who gets results is Mr. Louis W. Dawson, president of Mutual Of New York. Mr. Dawson sends a letter of welcome—typed individually and signed in ink—to each of the company's new policyholders. Most of the letter is form, but the name of the local field representative who sold the policy is always mentioned. To a Mr. Robert A. Turner in Ohio, President Dawson one day sent the usual letter with an appropriate reference to "E. Schmidt" as the company's local representative. From Mr. Turner came the following reply:*

Dear Mr. Dawson:

I assume you are a man of average intelligence because of the position you occupy. This would indicate that you have met some educational requirements. It would appear to me that in your haste to get to the golf course, you apparently don't read carefully that to which you affix your signature.

If, in my business, I were to send a letter, and refer to a representative of my company by initial and surname, without the minimum of respectful expression, my first thought would be that I, or the person transcribing the letter, had suffered a mental lapse.

From the information I have been able to assemble, your company is an excellent one with competent personnel. This I gathered from my contact with Mr. *Edgar* Schmidt, to whom you refer as E. Schmidt. In my conversations with Mr. Schmidt, I am quite sure no reference was made to you as L. Dawson, although it apparently would be justified.

As a rule I do not waste my time writing letters which will end up in the wastebasket. However, it being one of those days, and because I am endowed with the blessings of a democracy, I have complied with the last sentence of your attached letter.

Kinda silly of me, isn't it, Louie?

Best regards,

ROBERT A. TURNER

Mr. Dawson wrote back:

Dear Mr. Turner: (R. Turner, that is!)

Your letter of July 26th brightened my first day at the office after I returned from a short vacation.

* We are grateful to Mr. Dawson and Mutual Of New York for permission to use this exchange of letters.

I agree that the name "E. Schmidt" sounds rather abbreviated. But in preparing these notes of welcome to new policyholders, we have to be guided by the wishes of the field representative in question. Mr. Schmidt's agency office, in asking us to send the welcome letter to you, could have directed us to give his name in any way he wanted to appear. Unfortunately, they directed us to refer to him as E. Schmidt.

If I had presumed to change "E" to Edgar, because I liked it better, or because I thought you might like it better, then I might have gotten a letter from Mr. Schmidt's office, saying that he hates the name of Edgar, and why can't we please use his name in the form requested!

I am sorry you were upset by the incident. The best I can do, under the circumstances, is to give you permission to refer to me, any time you wish, as "L. Dawson"—which I hereby do.

I wish it were true that this incident occurred because I was rushing off to a golf course. That would be a simple and understandable excuse. But I haven't found out how to run a life insurance company and still find time to play any golf at all.

Please do not feel too badly about us. At least we *tried* to make you feel welcome as a new policyholder. In spite of the unsatisfactory start, I hope that we grow on you as time goes on.

Sincerely,

L. DAWSON

What had upset Mr. Turner? He had been sold some insurance by a man he knew as Edgar Schmidt, presumably a pleasant and convincing fellow. Since he knew "Edgar Schmidt" as a person, he found the "E. Schmidt" of the president's letter both insulting to Schmidt and impolite to himself. Furthermore the "misuse" of the name underlined a fact he knew already but would ordinarily have been quite willing to overlook—despite the individual typing and the genuine signature, Dawson's was a form letter. So, because it was "one of those days," he wrote his carping letter and put Mr. Dawson on the spot.

Mr. Dawson might have taken Mr. Turner's suggestion and put the letter in the wastebasket. Or he might have written a cold, factual letter of explanation:

Dear Mr. Turner:

I have received your letter of June 2, 1957, and wish to explain my reason for referring to Mr. Edgar Schmidt as E. Schmidt.

Due to the fact that each agency office of our company sends to my office . . .

Trusting that this is a satisfactory explanation of our reason for referring to "E. Schmidt" and welcoming you again as a policyholder of this company, I am,

Yours very truly,

LOUIS W. DAWSON

It is not difficult to imagine Mr. Turner's reaction to this letter—and this type of letter is what he would have received from some companies!

Instead, Mr. Dawson did a little thinking about Mr. Turner, whose annoyance grew from the apparent reduction of Edgar Schmidt to a piece of machinery and the fact that he had received a form letter. As a businessman, Turner could be expected to understand the problems involved in a president's writing to every new policyholder. Dawson also noted that Turner had a sense of humor. So he began with a good-humored reference to the specific rebuke: "Dear Mr. Turner: (R. Turner, that is!)." And instead of opening his first paragraph on a gloomy note ("I was disturbed, on my return from a short vacation, to discover your recent letter waiting on my desk"), he began on the pleasant one that Mr. Turner's letter had brightened his day. One can almost feel Turner thawing out: L. Dawson is, after all, not such a bad fellow. Dawson then proceeded to offer a sensible businessman's explanation for the appearance of "E. Schmidt," pleasantly gave Turner permission to address *him* as "L. Dawson," refuted the insinuation that he spent too many of his working hours on the golf course, and finally asked for forgiveness: "At least we *tried* to make you feel welcome." Now Turner's reply:

Dear Mr. Dawson: (to me, L. Dawson, as authorized)

You have been tried and found true, and I accept my deserved chastisement.

In all fairness, I confess that after reading a copy of my original letter, I find that I slightly nauseate myself.

You are a gentleman, and I shall endeavor to be a good policyholder. Please forgive my snide remarks and accept my apology.

Should you, however, have occasion to visit my town, I would be honored to have you as my guest at the golf course, inasmuch as I am now going to take up that game and discontinue writing letters.

Most respectfully,

R. TURNER

The happy ending—happy for both men and for Mutual Of New York—is the direct result of Mr. Dawson's thoughtful consideration of his reader as an individual. His friendly, informal, deftly good-humored, and sincere approach won a friend for his company. One can hear Mr. Turner telling his friends: "If you want insurance, why don't you try Mutual Of New York? . . ."

As Mr. Dawson's letter clearly indicates, for dealing with certain difficult situations humor is valuable. But it is dangerous! It can easily backfire, especially when it is committed to paper. The typed page cannot provide the atmosphere which makes most verbal humor "go"—the smile, the wink, the good fellowship in the air. It can convey the words only, words that must create the right effect no matter what the reader's background or mood may be. What seems howlingly funny to a man dictating after a pleasant lunch may seem deliberately insulting to a reader whose breakfast has not agreed with him or who has passed a sleepless night.

"Clever" humor is especially liable to misconstruction. Even if a reader understands what the clever writer is trying to do, he may still be thoroughly annoyed by the cleverness. Most men, after all, do not care very much for the fellow who is always showing off his versatility. They much prefer a correspondent whose letters may never provide a laugh, or even a chuckle, but regularly show unaffected friendliness.

Since few of us have an unerring gift for being clever in exactly the right spot and at exactly the right time, we probably should altogether avoid attempting it. But good humor, which need not include cleverness, is the most important quality that anyone can give to his letters. The writer who, like Louis Dawson, dictates with good humor will draw a friendly response from his correspondent. He may even draw a few chuckles. To do so, he must remember to put into practice two principles which Mr. Dawson understands well: His remarks should be pleasant rather than barbed; and they should be aimed at himself and the situation he finds himself in, not at the reader.

Communicating Up and Down the Ladder

Consideration of the reader may involve a number of specific factors, each of which is important in determining the type of communication to be used in a given instance.

The status of the reader is one. Is he higher up the ladder than you? On the same level? Lower? We have seen that the same sentence in two different letters of congratulations may get opposite reactions. And one might add the experience of a personnel manager who heard that an old college friend had just been promoted to *assistant* personnel manager of a firm about the size of his own. "I'm glad to see that at long last you have been given a much-deserved promotion," he wrote. He could not understand why his old chum was something less than cordial the next time they met.

Writing reports for the men "upstairs," for the boss and his boss and the general manager and the president, is not an easy job. It deserves a whole chapter and we give it one: Chapter 12. However, it may be well here to indicate briefly how the difference in status between the report writer and the man up the ladder affects the writing. For one thing, the writer generally knows more about his subject than the recipient does. The recipient does not need or want to know as much as the writer must know about the details. Indeed, the report writer dares not put into the report all he knows about the subject. Today's top executive will not read it. A very busy man, beseiged on every side by reading matter demanding his immediate attention, he complains bitterly about reports which fail to give him what he needs in brief form. Writing for the men at the top requires that every word be carefully chosen, that every extra phrase, sentence, or paragraph be eliminated. We recall one president who was buried under reports and wanted to get out from under. After making a preliminary survey of the reporting procedures in his company, we came back to him with some proposals. As we talked, we mentioned that one of his junior executives had recognized that his reports should be more concise. "But," this young man had told us, "it would take a lot of time to do the job right, and time costs the company money." We thought the president would explode. "Does he know how much *my* time is worth to the company?" he roared.

To the top executive, time is a most important commodity. He does not appreciate having his subordinates waste it for him.

Writing down the ladder can be as hazardous as writing up, for here difference in occupational status may be aggravated by difference in knowledge and background. An engineer communicating with a mechanic can make the same error in judgment that the Bureau of Standards did when a plumber wrote that he had discovered that hydrochloric acid was fine for cleaning out clogged drainpipes. The Bureau replied: "The efficacy of

hydrochloric acid is indisputable, but the corrosive residue is incompatible with metallic permanence." The plumber thanked the Bureau for the information and was happy that the Bureau approved of his measures. The Bureau wrote back: "We cannot assume responsibility for the production of toxic and noxious residue with hydrochloric acid and suggest you use an alternative procedure." The plumber said he was glad to know that the Bureau approved of his procedure. Desperate, the Bureau took the unprecedented step of using the plumber's own language: "Don't use hydrochloric acid. It eats hell out of the pipes."

This illustration may seem somewhat exaggerated, but similar misunderstandings are commonplace in industry. A survey of maintenance foremen in one company recently elicited such complaints about maintenance directives as "Call a spade a spade and not some engineering term"; or, "To the engineer at a desk the job can be done on paper and look fine; to the foreman on the job it may not be practical"; or, "Either use terms that are well understood, or else define them." Writing for subordinates, especially those not in management positions, is very difficult to do well. In this situation, the reader lacks status and is likely, therefore, to be insecure and tend to resent instructions from above, especially if they come from someone not very far above. It requires great tact and diplomacy to keep such a reader on the writer's side. Most of all, it requires careful thought about *his* situation and *his* probable reaction to what the writer has to tell him.

The Need for Good Habits

Few men have risen to senior executive positions who do not have the habit—whether from instinct or from careful learning—of considering the reader, for it is one of the keys to the management of men. "Every report," says Elliott Dunlap Smith, authority on management and communications,* "is an application either for promotion or demotion." In a very real sense this is true. As we have pointed out, it is largely by his reports that a junior executive is known to the "top brass" of his company. An outstanding report, one that meets the needs—not the prejudices—of the man for whom it is written, inevitably finds its way to the top. Its writer has made

* Smith's *Psychology for Executives* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, 1934) is a standard text in this field.

impression that will not be forgotten and will not go unrewarded. On e other hand, an ineffective report—bulky, repetitious, containing extra- ous material, impossible to find one's way around in—will probably go further (fortunately) than the man for whom it was written. It, too, will remembered—but not with favor.

Consideration of the reader, however, is not toadying to the reader's ejudices. A man may be considerate without losing his integrity and his f-respect. Blunt statements of fact or intention are necessary for some lividuals who will not or cannot understand any language but blunt ıguage. The considerate man—in correspondence as in personal relations is no yes-man.

Fred Peters of the Genung Manufacturing Company, probably a rea- ıably intelligent person, made a serious error because he failed to take reader fully into account when he wrote his letter to the Short Beach emical Company. It takes more than intelligence to write good letters l reports. It takes also a mind trained and habituated to consider *all* of factors involved, most especially the effect of a communication on the n or men who will receive it. Some men have a special genius for asuring this effect. But most of us have to train ourselves until con- eration of the reader becomes habitual whenever we sit down to write a mo or a letter or a report.

strative Materials

Benjamin Franklin was probably as shrewd and successful a businessman as we have seen in this country. He was a man who habitually considered the other fellow's point of view. His Autobiography *contains the following eloquent statement of the value of thinking about the audience. He is speaking of humility:*

I cannot boast of much success in acquiring the *reality* of this virtue, I had a good deal in regard to the *appearance* of it. I made it a rule to ear all direct contradiction to the sentiments of others, and all positive rtions of my own. I even forbade myself the use of every word or ex- sion in the language that imported a fixed opinion, such as *certainly,*

undoubtedly, and so on. I adopted instead of them, *I conceive, I apprehend,* or *I imagine* a thing to be so and so, or *it so appears to me at the present.*

When another asserted something that I thought an error, I denied myself the pleasure of contradicting him abruptly and of showing some absurdity in his proposition; and in answering, I began by observing that in certain cases or circumstances his opinion would be right, but in the present case there *appeared* or *seemed* to be some difference.

To this habit I credit the weight my fellow citizens gave to my opinions when I proposed new institutions, and my influence in public councils when I became a member; for I was but a bad speaker, never eloquent, subject to much hesitation in the choice of words, hardly correct in my language, and yet I generally carried my points.

2

Gentlemen:

In filling our order of June 16, 1957 (your Order No. 2693), you sent 200 round Wentworth electric wall clocks, No. 102–A, set in a cork base.

My order and your invoice call for 200 round Wentworth electric wall clocks, No. 102–AB, set in a mahogany base. Please send us promptly the ones called for (No. 102–AB, mahogany base). We will return the others for credit.

On this same order we requested immediate shipment of two dozen Wentworth "Charm Alarm" clocks which did not come, did not appear on invoice or packing slip, and had no "will follow" notice. Please send them also without fail, or notify me that you will not supply them.

I have dealt with your firm for years largely because of your promptness and accuracy in filling orders. We can easily procure annoyance and carelessness locally, and will do so if your service is deteriorating to the nuisance level. I will appreciate an acknowledgment of this letter as well as the merchandise ordered.

Yours very truly,

T. J. BARSTOW

a. *What do the first three paragraphs tell you about the writer of this letter?*
b. *What does paragraph 4 tell you?*

c. *Analyze carefully the effect which this letter is likely to have on the company to which it is sent. All of the facts presented by Mr. Barstow are accurate.*

3

In 1848, when he was a lawyer in Springfield, Illinois, Abraham Lincoln received a letter from his stepbrother, John D. Johnston, requesting a loan. Here is Lincoln's reply:

Dear Johnston:

Your request for eighty dollars, I do not think it best to comply with now. At the various times when I have helped you a little, you have said to me, "We can get along very well now," but in a very short time I find you in the same difficulty again. Now this can only happen by some defect in your conduct. What that defect is, I think I know. You are not lazy, and still you are an idler. I doubt whether since I saw you, you have done a good whole day's work, in any one day. You do not very much dislike to work, and still you do not work much, merely because it does not seem to you that you could get much for it.

This habit of uselessly wasting time, is the whole difficulty; it is vastly important to you, and still more so to your children, that you should break this habit. It is more important to them, because they have longer to live, and can keep out of an idle habit before they are in it, easier than they can get out after they are in.

You are now in need of some ready money; and what I propose is, that you shall go to work, "tooth and nail," for somebody who will give you money for it.

Let father and your boys take charge of your things at home—prepare for a crop, and make the crop, and you go to work for the best money wages, or in discharge of any debt you owe, that you can get. And to secure you a fair reward for your labor, I now promise you that for every dollar you will, between this and the first of May, get for your own labor either in money or in your own indebtedness, I will then give you one other dollar.

By this, if you hire yourself at ten dollars a month, from me you will get ten more, making twenty dollars a month for your work. In this, I do not mean you shall go off to St. Louis, or the lead mines, or the gold mines, in California, but I mean for you to go at it for the best wages you can get close to home—in Coles County.

Now if you will do this, you will soon be out of debt, and what is better, you will have a habit that will keep you from getting in debt again. But if I should now clear you out, next year you will be just as deep in as ever. You say you would almost give your place in Heaven for $70 or $80. Then you value your place in Heaven very cheaply, for I am sure you can with the offer I make you get the seventy or eighty dollars for four or five months' work. You say if I furnish you the money you will deed me the land, and if you don't pay the money back, you will deliver possession—

Nonsense! If you can't now live with the land, how will you then live without it? You have always been kind to me, and I do not now mean to be unkind to you. On the contrary, if you will but follow my advice, you will find it worth more than eight times eighty dollars to you.

Affectionately,

Your brother,

A. LINCOLN

Obviously Lincoln considered the reader of this letter and worked out the kind of communication he felt most likely to get the results he wanted.

a. *To what extent does Lincoln's purpose determine the order in which he presents his materials and to what extent does it affect the tone of the letter?*

b. *How does the wording of key phrases modify the effect of the whole?*

4

A friend of ours recently bought an expensive modern chair and found himself involved in an exchange of letters which certainly did not improve the customer relations of Bacon-Lundberg Company, from whom he bought it.

March 13, 1959

Dear Mr. Lundberg:

Our Swedish chair arrived the other day, and we are very pleased with the way it looks in our living room.

When my wife went to wax it, however, she discovered a crack on the inside face of one of the uprights in the back. We can't tell how serious a flaw it is, but it looks to us as if it might well spread.

We are going to be passing through Chicago on Easter Day and can

leave the chair with my father, who lives at 4308 Bartlett Street, for you to have it picked up there. Will that be a satisfactory arrangement?

I would appreciate your answering immediately as we must make our plans this week.

Sincerely yours,

RALPH C. LAMBERT

Dear Mr. Lambert:

We acknowledge your letter of the 13th, and would be glad to inspect and adjust on your chair, if your father can arrange to bring the piece to our shop.

Should we find that the condition you report is due to a manufacturing defect, needless to say, all necessary adjustments will be attended to without charge. By the same token however, if we determine that the chair is not in good order because of damage in transit we would be obliged to look to you for the cost of any adjustment we undertake. With reference to this, we wonder if you have proceeded to file claim with the carrier as yet. If you have not, it would be well to do so at once.

If you plan to return the chair to us on this basis, kindly advise, and we will notify either you or your parents of the address of our shop and a return order number.

Very truly yours,

L. BOST

Dear Mr. Bost:

We have filed with the carrier about the chair which we reported to you as having arrived in imperfect condition. The Railway Express Agent's Inspection Report reads as follows:

> One small defect on back of chair. Wood raised and small crack.
> Not transportation damage.

I should add that I am thoroughly annoyed at your suggestion that my "father can arrange to bring the piece" to your shop. Even if he were a

young man and had an automobile, neither of which happens to be true, it would still be an imposition.

Inasmuch as the chair arrived with a defect, we could have shipped it back to you collect. Instead we are taking the trouble to see that the chair gets to Chicago at no charge to you. Surely one of your trucks could pick it up there.

Since our marriage a year ago, we have bought a bedroom set and the chair in question at Bacon-Lundberg. There are other items of furniture which we still need. But if this is the sort of service that your company gives, perhaps we'd better do our shopping elsewhere—and suggest to our friends that they do the same.

If you find that you can have the chair picked up at my father's, I'd appreciate hearing from you immediately so that we can arrange to bring it to Chicago (at considerable inconvenience, I might add).

There is a noticeable misweave in the back cushion, so we will return that for your inspection also.

Yours truly,

RALPH C. LAMBERT

Dear Mr. Lambert:

We are in receipt of your letter of the 17th and regret that you are dissatisfied with our reply to your previous correspondence. We were trying to be helpful and as a matter of fact afforded your letter special attention and answered it immediately as we are doing now, for we appreciated that you would be pressed for time in making your arrangements.

If it is not possible for you or your father to return the pieces to us, we would be glad to call for them in Chicago. However, not having seen the present condition of the chair back or cushion, we must extend the possible charge basis outlined to you previously to cartage charges as well, and we would look to you for cartage charges if we found upon inspection that we are not responsible for the condition you reported.

If you wish us to make the pick up on this basis, please advise us and we shall have our drivers call at his home after the 25th.

Very truly yours,

L. BOST

Dear Mr. Bost:

Since Bacon-Lundberg is being so very cautious about responsibility for the crack in our chair back despite the Railway Express report, it behooves us to be cautious too. I think it would be wise for us to be present when you examine the chair.

I find that I must be in Chicago on April 22 and shall plan to bring the chair and pillow to your shop. I should appreciate, therefore, your sending me the address and the return order number mentioned in your letter of March 15.

Thank you for the speed with which you answered my letters.

Yours truly,

RALPH C. LAMBERT

Mr. Lambert did bring the chair in on April 22, and since the defects were clearly the responsibility of Bacon-Lundberg, he received a new chair and pillow. At the shop he was treated promptly and courteously. However, he has not bought any more furniture from Bacon-Lundberg. He has not been able to forget the annoyance which this incident caused him.

5

Here is a memo from "the main office" telling a man in one of the branches that a suggestion he made is not practical.

TO: Fritz Jackson—Detroit
FROM: John Gordon
SUBJECT: Lamp List, Green Co. vs. Linton Supply

Thanks for your suggestion that we have branches buy their lamps individually from Linton. Such a procedure would eliminate double handling but would cause several other difficulties. We checked past purchases by the branches from the shop and discovered that the duplication involved in having branches do individual buying would more than offset the saving. The change of procedure would require much more paper work to keep the branches informed of the specification changes on the various lamps.

I know that you are thinking primarily of customer service on small items like lamps. Central Control has been considering this problem for

several weeks. I can tell you that we are opening a Small Parts Department, which we hope will provide better delivery on small items. Just as soon as the stocks have been moved from the Chicago shop to Central Purchasing, a general announcement will be made.

Thanks again for the suggestion. Keep them coming. We appreciate them.

a. *If you had received this memo, would you feel that your suggestion had been given careful consideration?*
b. *Does John Gordon sound like a "know-it-all" from the home office who likes to lord it over the men in the branches or like someone who appreciates the problems of the men in the field?*
c. *On what specific things in the memo do you base your opinion of Gordon?*
d. *What were John Gordon's problems in writing the memo?*
e. *How did he attempt to solve them?*

6

Early in 1958 Chesebrough-Pond's, Inc., decided that it must close its plant at McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania. Having made its decision, the company prepared a plan designed to reduce to a minimum the hardship which would inevitably result. As part of the plan two letters were prepared—one to be sent to each employee, another to be sent to local banks, utilities, key community leaders, and local and state government agencies. We are grateful to Chesebrough-Pond's, Inc., for permission to reproduce these two letters, which admirably illustrate the principles presented in this chapter.

Note especially what materials are included in each letter, the order in which they are placed, and the amount and kind of emphasis given to each point.

A Letter to Employees at McKees Rocks

This is not the kind of letter one wants to write to people who have worked long and loyally for Chesebrough-Pond's. Regrettably, it is necessary.

The purpose of this letter is to inform you that we must soon dis-

continue operations at the McKees Rocks plant and close it down. I want to tell you why this is necessary.

We have had a major plant problem as the result of the merger of Chesebrough with Pond's in July 1955. We found ourselves with three manufacturing locations which duplicated facilities and overhead expenses. This has been a heavy burden for the company to carry, but we wanted to study the problem carefully and thoroughly before deciding what to do about it.

The first study, made more than two years ago, indicated that McKees Rocks should be closed down. We were not satisfied that all factors had been given full consideration, however, and the Manufacturing Division employed two independent consultants to make further professional studies of our manufacturing and distribution problems. The results forced us to conclude, reluctantly, that manufacturing at McKees Rocks is no longer practical or economical. In addition, because we can now consolidate shipments in the East, any real freight advantage we may have had in the past by shipping from McKees Rocks to western points has now been eliminated.

We are very much aware what this decision may mean to you and of the possible hardships it might cause. We want to do everything we can to help you during the time you are looking for new employment . . . and we are going to do our best to help you to find a new job. We have proposed a termination-pay program to your union representatives which is based on years of service with the company. Upon agreement with your union, we will outline for you your termination benefits, option of continuing your life insurance and surgical-hospitalization plan, and procedures for applying for unemployment compensation.

Full participation in termination benefits depends, of course, upon your remaining with the company as long as manufacturing operations require your employment. As much notice as possible will be given you before actual termination, so that you will have sufficient time to seek new employment.

In addition, we are going to work with the various state and regional government agencies to put forth every effort to place you in a new position, find a new owner for the plant, and make certain that your unemployment compensation application will get immediate attention.

Here is the probable schedule of termination:

1. Petroleum jelly, hair tonic, and Lip-Ice will be discontinued within the next few weeks.

2. The Sterile Plant will be discontinued before the end of the year.

More specific details will be given you by your foreman or supervisor.

I want to say, again, that it is with extreme regret that Chesebrough-Pond's finds it has to leave this community. McKees Rocks is a good plant and you helped to make it so. On behalf of all of us, please accept our deepest appreciation for your loyal service. Be assured that we will do everything possible to help you to make new adjustments.

ANTHONY OLADKO
Vice President

A Letter to Business and Community Leaders

Chesebrough-Pond's, Inc., regrettably finds it necessary to terminate its operations at McKees Rocks and to close down the plant by the end of the year. We wanted to advise you of this move because of the effect it will have on the people in the community who have been with this Company for many years.

We have had a major plant problem as the result of the merger of Chesebrough with the Pond's Company in July, 1955. We found ourselves with three manufacturing locations which duplicated facilities and overhead expenses. After a thorough investigation of our manufacturing and distribution problems, we have been forced to conclude that manufacturing at McKees Rocks is no longer practical or economical. In addition, because we can now consolidate shipments in the East, any real freight advantage we may have had in the past by shipping from McKees Rocks to western points has now been eliminated.

Our decision is based on three studies. The first was done two years ago and the subsequent ones, made by two independent consultants, went further into our manufacturing and distributing problems. We are satisfied that all factors involved have been given careful consideration.

Since our arrival in McKees Rocks in 1923, we have endeavored to carry out our responsibilities as a corporate citizen in an effective and forthright manner. We hope to leave McKees Rocks with the feeling that our return would always be welcomed.

As a measure of our corporate responsibility, we have proposed to our employees' union representatives a generous employee benefits program for our employees during the transitory period when they are seeking new employment. This program includes retirement of eligible employees, a generous severance pay plan based on years of service, and payment of accumulated vacation pay.

In addition, an employment office has been established and we are currently engaged in helping our employees find new positions. Working with state and local agencies, we are making every effort to locate a company that may be interested in moving to or expanding in this area and utilizing our plant.

Because of these activities we believe that our employees will make the transition to new employment with a minimum of financial difficulty. These activities represent the carrying out of corporate and community responsibilities to the limit of our means and clearly indicate our desire to do all that is possible for our employees.

Again, I should like to reiterate that this action has been taken reluctantly for we have enjoyed our past 25 years in this community. On behalf of Chesebrough-Pond's, Inc., may I offer our sincere thanks for your cooperation and understanding.

Sincerely,

ANTHONY OLADKO
Vice President

3. Wasteful Prose

Wordiness—the use of words and phrases which are not needed to do a job—and unnecessarily heavy phrasing—the use of five words when two would do or the use of big words when small ones would do—are probably, along with excessive use of jargon, the most common and most obvious problems in business writing. Let us begin with an example of wordiness:

> In summary, we suggest that the XYZ Company be immediately contacted regarding the important matter of the inspection of plated parts so that they may be advised of our desires. [32 words]

All the writer really wanted to say was:

> Therefore, we suggest you ask the XYZ Company immediately to inspect the plated parts. [14 words]

The second version is shorter, simpler, friendlier—and for all those reasons, not only more efficient but also more effective. Moreover, although the rewritten version uses fewer than half the words of the original, it is as exact—even more exact, because the verb forms "contacted" and "advised" are not only vague in meaning but also suggest that two steps are involved. There can be no question about the meaning of "We suggest you ask."

The Natural Redundancy of English

Most people do not realize that the English language has so much redundancy built into its natural structure as protection against misinterpretation that the extra clarifying words are seldom needed to make sure that a message is not misunderstood. Even in the rewritten sentence of fourteen

words above, we could strike out every other word and still leave enough information for the message to get through:

> **Therefore — suggest — ask — XYZ — immediately — inspect — plated —.**

Or we could leave out all the vowels in the message and probably still communicate:

> **Thrfr, w sggst y sk th *XYZ* Cmpny mmdtly t nspct th pltd prts.**

If we struck out every other word *and* left out the vowels, the message might still get through:

> **Thrfr sggst sk *XYZ* mmdtly nspct pltd.**

We are not recommending this procedure, of course, and it will not work with every sentence. We are merely suggesting that the English language has acquired over the centuries a safety factor which permits an individual to use it without further redundancy.

In fact, our experience has indicated that very often more confusion of meaning is caused by too many words than by too few. Verbiage interferes with communication—"clogs the channel" or confuses the "receiver," to use the jargon of engineering and information theory. If a message contains more "bits" of information than are necessary, the reader, in going through it, has to do two jobs at once. He must winnow out and set aside the unnecessary words; and from what is left, he must piece together the idea intended for communication. Naturally, with two simultaneous jobs on his hands, he may well become annoyed, if not confused.

Reader Reaction to Wasteful Prose

Although they may not know consciously that they are doing so until it is called to their attention, most readers adjust automatically to this unnecessary demand on their time and energy. If they have a wordy letter to read, they begin to skip. Many businessmen have told us that after receiving several letters from a correspondent, they know whether or not they can skip-read. Frequently a person who receives a cluttered letter asking a favor which he does not have to grant becomes so annoyed that he reads only far enough to understand the situation before stopping to dictate a refusal. At best, therefore, wordiness and heavy phrasing invite the reader to skip—a dangerous practice, because he may pass by an important piece

of information. At worst, they invite him to toss the letter aside without reading to the end.*

Still another important argument for concise writing is one which receives little recognition. We pointed out in the first chapter that whether they realize it or not, people judge a writer by his writing, for all writing suggests a personality. Blown-up writing suggests an inefficient, pompous windbag. The writer may not be a windbag, but he presents that image to his correspondents. In our work, we have often found that when we meet a person, we have to change opinions formed on the basis of his letters and reports. The change does not alter the fact that we *did* form an opinion of him from his writing and that if we had not met him our initial opinion would have held. Although such impressions may often be unfortunate and in a sense unfair, the writer is responsible for them, not the reader. The reader can only react to the evidence before him; the writer supplies it. If he wants his letters and reports to reflect an efficient and friendly person, he must take pains to make them do so. He can blame only himself if his writing leads his reader to form an incorrect opinion of him.

A further complication of this problem is that a reader tends to assign to the writer's company any opinion he forms of the writer himself. If by their wordiness letters or reports suggest inefficiency, the reader is likely to feel that the company the writer represents is inefficient. Here again such an impression may not be true; but the only protection management has against anyone's receiving it is to be sure that letters and reports to customers and to the general public do not convey it. They can just as well suggest efficiency—and any other qualities management wants its customers and the general public to assign to the company.

Case Study: A Weighty Memo

Here is the opening paragraph of a memorandum from the president of the Lofton Company to one of his vice-presidents (the entire memorandum is given at the end of this chapter):

* Skip-reading of ineffective letters has become so much a part of the businessman's way of life that experts have evolved a procedure for it: "In reading business letters a three-step technique will visually tell you if a thorough reading is necessary. The letterhead will tell you where it is from; the signature will tell you whom it is from; and the first sentence will tell whether the writer is getting right down to business. If he isn't, drop two-thirds of the way through the letter for the central point."—From "Five Steps to Faster Reading, Lesson III" by The Reading Laboratory, Inc., *Product Engineering*, January 19, 1959, p. 21.

> We received a telephone call from Mr. Herbert J. Jones of the Barton Aluminum Company late this morning, in which he reported among other things that he and various other Barton people have been carrying on a series of discussions with one Dr. Nash of one of the firms in the field of investments from Los Angeles. Dr. Nash was quoted as having said that he was interested in Lofton but also that he would very much like to be introduced to certain important people from Lofton in various areas so that he could discuss certain matters with them, all leading to the possibility, he hoped, of learning more with reference to this company than he now knew, and that at first-hand rather than from our publications or from written reports or the usual financial statements and analyses.

At first glance, it might seem as if the writer had delivered himself of a message of weight and moment. But the weight is in the language, not in the content. In the first sentence, for example, why did he have to stipulate that the call came "late" this morning, that Jones reported "among other things," "that he and various other Barton people have been carrying on a series of discussions," or that Dr. Nash is "of one of the firms" in "the field of" investments? All of the material enclosed in quotation marks is unnecessary. Why say that "Dr. Nash was quoted as having said"? Surely there are no grounds for libel here. Why must the president be so careful?

Placing a rewritten—and much improved—version alongside the original shows how windy the writer really is:

> I had a call from Herb Jones of Barton Aluminum this morning. He said that they have been spending some time with a Dr. Nash from a Los Angeles investment firm. Dr. Nash expressed an interest in Lofton and said that he would like to meet some of our key people and learn a little more about us firsthand.

The most obvious improvement is that the paragraph has been reduced from 136 words to 59 words. But there is even more improvement: the two versions present two different personalities. The original suggests a man who tries to make his every little act seem important, who needs fanfare and trumpets whenever he answers the phone, who wastes the time of anyone he deals with. The rewritten version, on the other hand, suggests a man who is efficient without being cold, who gets right to the point without being curt, who is sure enough of himself and his staff to be friendly and at ease. Other things being equal, is there any doubt which memo suggests the better administrator?

Wordiness

One difficulty with the original version of the president's memorandum is that it is just plain wordy. Whole phrases can be omitted without loss. Writing throughout business and industry suffers from this fault. Here are some further examples. The brackets indicate words that could have been left out:

> [Regarding the question of the action of] the mixture of hydrofluoric and perchloric acid [on the gold dishes, we wish to advise that this mixture] will attack the gold dishes.
>
> This price is 75¢ per gross higher than [the price existing] at the close of the year.
>
> This is a substitute method of [providing a] securing [of] the buggy.
>
> [It is the intent of] these regulations [to] describe a new accounting procedure.
>
> [In order] to expedite [receipt of] purchase orders [at the earliest possible date], please mark them for the attention of H. O. Jones.

The best way for a businessman to sensitize himself to wordiness is to watch for it in incoming mail. Drawing a line through unnecessary words in the letters one receives is enlightening. It is still more enlightening to do the same thing with a batch of one's own letters or reports written a year or more ago. Such "cold" material can be read with an objectivity impossible with fresh letters and reports. When a man recognizes wordiness in his own earlier writing and discovers the particular contexts in which it is likely to appear, he begins to recognize it in his current writing and learns to avoid it.

Heavy Phrasing

A further—but allied—writing problem that appears in the paragraph about the telephone call is heavy phrasing: using eight words where five would do, or "big" words where more common ones would do. Instead of saying that Jones has been "discussing" matters with Dr. Nash, the president says that Jones has "been carrying on a series of discussions" with him. It is not enough for Nash to be "from a Los Angeles investment firm"; he has to be "of *one of the firms in the field of* investments from Los Angeles." And he cannot just "say" something; he must be "quoted as having said" it.

Heavy Connectives

The same paragraph also provides examples of two special types of heavy phrasing: heavy connectives and elegant variations. The writer says that Dr. Nash wants to learn "more *with reference to* this company" when he intends "more *about* this company." Heavy connectives are wordy phrases which writers have gotten into the habit of using to connect parts of a sentence or to relate the ideas in two sentences. Frequently they are employed where one or two words would serve better. Thus

> We will not approve HardRok for use *in conjunction with* our bonded roofs *due to the fact that* it is too light.

could have been written

> We will not approve HardRok for use *with* our bonded roofs *because* it is too light.

Heavy connectives have come into general business writing from several different sources. *In the amount of* instead of *for* probably comes from the accountants:

> We have billed you *in the amount of* $6,723.

Its use in business is now widespread. *With respect to* instead of *of* and *in the order of* instead of *about* are favorites of the engineers:

> The barge *with respect to* over-all length is 70 feet.
> The over-all length of the barge is *in the order of* 70 feet.

Many businessmen have adopted these circumlocutions.

Elegant Variations

If he were to put aside elegant variations, no sportswriter could keep his job. In our newspapers few athletic teams "defeat" their opponents: instead they "sink," "whip," "trounce," "overpower," "murder," "clobber," "sock," "outslug," "edge," or "shade" them. Furthermore, whether a team is "edged" or "trounced" depends on which home-town paper the story appears in. Detroit will learn from its papers that the Tigers were edged by the Red Sox. Boston will learn that they were trounced. Elegant variations, in sports as elsewhere, were originally invented because writers

wanted to avoid repetition and to brighten up their prose. We can imagine the impact on readers the first time the word "clobbered" was used by a sportswriter to describe what the home team did to its opponents. But one can go only so far with such sensationalism. All of the possibilities have been sought out and have been so overused that the metaphor which once struck readers forcefully has no effect on them now. When we see the headline "Cats Clobber Clowns" we do not think of the Clowns as bloody and bruised from a terrible beating. "Clobber" makes no more impression on us than "defeat" or "beat."

Although businessmen have always been somewhat more restrained in using variations than sportswriters, they often display such a tendency. Mr. Jones, in our memo, "reported" when he could have "said." In business letters we frequently find:

necessitate = require
effect *or* institute *or* effectuate = make
effect an alternative procedure = make a change
purchase = buy
inquire = ask
revise downward = lower
finalize = complete
usage = use
expectation = hope

These are only a few of the standard variations. And some of them are clearly preferable to others.

Occasional variations, even "elegant" ones, may seem necessary to avoid awkward repetition. In fact, they seldom are. For repetition of a word is seldom annoying to a reader if it is required for clear statement of an idea. He is only annoyed when the repetition is clumsy and unnecessary. Once again we come back to a first principle: Say what you have to say in clear, straightforward prose.

Supplying Too Much Information

Prose can be wasteful in another way. Sometimes a writer gives too much information, information that the reader either already has or does not need. Everyone has received letters that rehearse the whole situation

for the reader before saying anything new. Writers sometimes devote entire opening paragraphs to reviews of previous correspondence. Here is an example:

> In reply to your letter of July 19, in which you state that you received 2 only No. 608 bottles (blue) with white stoppers and 2 only No. 609 bottles (white) with blue stoppers, each pair of bottles packed and shipped separately, we have questioned our order and shipping departments closely to discover the reason for the bottles reaching you with the wrong stoppers and in different shipments even though they were ordered by you on the same order for shipment at the same time by the same carrier so that you could most conveniently reship same to your customer as soon as they arrived without any loss of time or unnecessary confusion and without having to store one pair of bottles until the second pair arrived.

This writer not only tried to retell the whole story of the blue and the white bottles, but tried to do it in one sentence. His reader, if familiar with the problem, will probably simply skip over a lengthy statement of it; if he needs to review the correspondence, he will ask his secretary for the file rather than depend upon the writer's summary.

Here is a slightly different example. First, the complete text of the incoming letter, the one to be answered:

> On May 20, our Freemont Plant shipped car COX 4702 containing Sodium Carbolate against your order BY 70–32.
>
> According to our laboratory report the salable acid content was 57.7%. The specific gravity was 1.096 and the car contained 7,855 gallons. Just as soon as your plant reports their analysis and gallonage, we can get together on settlement.

Here is the beginning of the answering letter:

> With reference to your letter of June 2 covering COX 4702 containing Sodium Carbolate shipped by your Freemont Plant to our Meadville plant on May 20 against order BY 70–32, we wish to advise that we have received our plant report on this car.
>
> In comparing the gallonage, I find a difference which is substantially greater than we would normally expect to encounter. Remembering that this car . . .

Note that in the reply the opening phrase of the first paragraph contains all of the information in the first paragraph of the incoming letter plus two additional items: "your letter of June 2" and "our Meadville plant." Cer-

tainly some of that information in the opening phrase is superfluous. Since there is a disagreement, the man to whom the answer is addressed will have to go to his records to check invoices and laboratory reports. The date of his letter, the words "Sodium Carbolate," and either the car number or the order number should be enough information to help his secretary find the right file.

Occasionally a letter writer feels that he must begin by summarizing the letter that he is answering for the benefit of other people in his company to whom he should send copies of his reply. Without such a summary, they will not be able to understand what he is saying to the customer. The solution to that problem is to write the best possible letter—that is, one without the opening summarizing paragraph—then have his secretary add a brief summary at the bottom of the carbon copies of the letter. Thus the customer will get an efficient letter and the readers of the carbons will have all the information necessary for understanding them.

Another type of communication in which the writer often supplies too much information is the report. Directors of research and members of management frequently complain that report writers clutter the body of a report with so many unnecessary details and so many excursions into matters of purely personal interest that the reader loses sight of the structure of their exposition.

A personnel man, for example, wrote a report of his management-appraisal program. It was intended primarily to inform the people in the field who had been making the appraisals for several years that the company was profiting from the work and the time they were putting into them. Twelve pages long, the report discussed the purpose of the program, analyzed both the appraisal forms and the procedure which the appraisers used to fill them out, summarized the picture of management personnel given by the completed forms, and evaluated the entire program. The writer was crestfallen when he learned that the personnel manager thought that the report was much too long and involved. And it was long and involved. By the time he finished reading—if he finished reading—the twelve pages, he was so thoroughly entangled in scales and scores and other details that he remembered only dimly the purpose of the report. Furthermore, the intended readers, the appraisers, already were thoroughly familiar with much of the detail.

The report was eventually rewritten to make the important information in it more readily available. As a first step, it was shortened a page and a half by the removal of wordiness and unnecessary repetition. What

was left was then rearranged so that the information of real interest to the reader was presented in three pages as the body of the report. The supporting details and paraphernalia, of interest only to some of the potential readers, went into four appendices, shorter and better organized. Not only for the intended readers but for anyone else who picked it up, the rewritten report said far more clearly what the writer intended to say than did his original version.

Supplying too much information can be as dangerous as supplying too little. In his now famous essay on communication theory, Warren Weaver discusses the danger in trying to force too much information over a communication channel. Then he goes on to say:

> A general theory . . . will surely have to take into account not only the capacity of the channel but also (even the words are right!) the capacity of the audience. If you try to overcrowd the capacity of the audience, it is probably true, by direct analogy, that you do not, so to speak, fill the audience up and then waste only the remainder by spilling. More likely, and again by direct analogy, if you overcrowd the capacity of the audience you force a general and inescapable error and confusion.*

Wordiness, heavy phrasing, heavy connectives, and too much information make letters and reports wordy, windy, and weighty. They fly directly in the face of the current tendency to be informal. They suggest a pompous, inefficient writer and a company that is no better. But even more, as we shall see in the ensuing chapters, they bring with them a whole flock of other writing problems: business jargon, the unnecessary passive construction, faulty sentence structure, and many of the other ills that plague writing in business and industry today.

Illustrative Materials

1

Listed below in the left column are most of the popular heavy connectives. Now and then one must use them. Usually, however, the effective connective in the right column can be substituted.

* Warren Weaver, "Recent Contributions to the Mathematical Theory of Communication," in Claude E. Shannon and Weaver, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1949), p. 116.

HEAVY	EFFECTIVE
as regards	about
as related to	for, about
along the lines of	like
after this is accomplished	then
as to	on, about (*or nothing*)
by means of	by, with
due to the fact that	because
for the purpose of	for
for the reason that	since, because
in accordance with	by, under
inasmuch as	since, because
in case	if
in conjunction with	with
in connection with	of
in favor of	for, to
in the light of the fact that	since
in order to	to
in reference to	about
in regard to	about
in relation to	with
in terms of	in
in the amount of	of, for
in the case of	for, by, in, if
in the event of	if
in the event that	if
in the instance of	for
in the majority of instances	usually
in the matter of	about, in
in the nature of	like
in the neighborhood of	about
in the order of	about
in the order of magnitude of	about
in the time of	during
in total	of
in view of	since
in view of the above	therefore
in view of the foregoing circumstances	therefore
in view of the fact that	because, since

HEAVY	EFFECTIVE
on a few occasions	occasionally
on behalf of	for
on the basis of	on
on the grounds that	since, because
on the part of	for, among, by
pertaining to	about
prior to	before
subsequent to	after
to summarize the above	in summary
with a view to	to
with reference to	about
with regard to	about
with respect to	about, of
with the exception of	except
with the result that	so that

2

One effective method of reducing the number of elegant variations in one's writing is to make a collection of them from incoming communications. A few of those commonly used in business are:

ELEGANT	EFFECTIVE
Nouns	
aggregate	total
assistance	help
compensation	pay
discrepancy	difference
modification	change
objective	aim, goal
obligation	debt
utilization	use
Verbs	
ascertain	find out, learn
contribute	give
construct	build
demonstrate	show

Verbs

effectuate	carry out
encounter	meet
endeavor	try
facilitate	make easy
forward	send
initiate	begin
occasion	cause
proceed	go
procure	get
purchase	buy
reimburse	pay
terminate	end
transmit	send
utilize	use

Modifiers

approximately	about
equivalent	equal
initial	first
optimum	best
presently	now
subsequent	next
sufficient	enough

3

Elegant variations have been popular in all ages. During the sixteenth century in England, for example, inkhorn terms—words "Englished" from foreign languages—were much in vogue as substitutes for standard words. Thomas Wilson, in his Art of Rhetoric *(1553), attacks the users of inkhorn terms and gives as a "horrible example" a clergyman's letter of application for a vacant benefice. It was written to "a gentleman that waited on the Lord Chancellor." Most of the elegant variations, as one would guess, are words concocted from Latin.*

Pondering, expending, and revoluting with myself your ingent affability and ingenious capacity for mundane affairs, I cannot but celebrate

and extol your magnifical dexterity above all others. For how could you have adepted such illustrate prerogative and dominical superiority if the fecundity of your ingenie had not been so fertile and wonderfully pregnant? Now, therefore, being accersited to such splendente renoun and dignity splendidious, I doubt not but you will adjuvate such poor adnichilate orphans as once were condisciples with you, and of antique familiarity in Lincolnshire. Among whom I, being a scholastical panion, obtestate your sublimity to extol my infirmity. There is a sacerdotal dignity in my native country, contiguate to me where I now contemplate, which your worshipful benignity could soon impetrate for me if it would like you to extend your sedules and collaude me in them to the right honorable Lord Chancellor. . . . I obtestate your clemency to invigilate thus much for me, according to my confidence, and as you know my condign merits for such a compendious living. But now I relinquish to fatigate your intelligence with any more frivilous verbosity, and therefore he that rules the climates be evermore your beautreux, your fortress, and your bulwark.

4

The nineteenth-century English essayist Charles Lamb, who loved long and intricate sentences, almost raised the elegant variation to the level of art. Here, for example, is the opening of his "A Chapter on Ears."*

I have no ear.

Mistake me not, Reader—nor imagine that I am by nature destitute of those exterior twin appendages, hanging ornaments, and (architecturally speaking) handsome volutes to the human capital. Better my mother had never borne me.—I am, I think, rather delicately than copiously provided with those conduits; and I feel no disposition to envy the mule for his plenty, or the mole for her exactness, in those ingenious labyrinthine inlets—those indispensable side-intelligencers.

Neither have I incurred, or done anything to incur, with Defoe, that hideous disfigurement,† which constrained him to draw upon assurance—to feel "quite unabashed," and at ease upon that article. I was never, I thank my stars, in the pillory; nor, if I read them aright, is it within the compass of my destiny, that I ever should be.

* *The Essays of Elia* in *The Life and Works of Charles Lamb* (London and Boston: The Edinburgh Society, 1899), 4:74–75.

† Lamb here accepts the story, now known to be untrue, that Defoe's ears were cut off as part of his punishment for seditious libel in 1703.

When therefore I say that I have no ear, you will understand me to mean—*for music.* To say that this heart never melted at the concord of sweet sounds, would be a foul self-libel. "Water parted from the sea" never fails to move it strangely. So does "In infancy." But they were used to be sung at her harpsichord (the old-fashioned instrument in vogue in those days) by a gentlewoman—the gentlest, sure, that ever merited the appellation—the sweetest—why should I hesitate to name Mrs. S——, once the blooming Fanny Weatheral of the Temple—who had power to thrill the soul of Elia, small imp as he was, even in his long coats; and to make him glow, tremble, and blush with a passion, that not faintly indicated the day-spring of that absorbing sentiment which was afterwards destined to overwhelm and subdue his nature quite for Alice W——n.

5

*The following description of our civilization was written by Dr. Robert E. Doherty nearly a quarter of a century ago.**

Our civilization is characterized by rapid, undirected change. We are living in a kaleidoscopic, technological world in which we are being whisked at an ever-increasing tempo from a simple to a complex society—from an aggregation of social units which formerly were comparatively immobile, isolated, and self-sufficient, to a highly mechanized system of interdependent ones.

I need not burden you with a detailed account, such as you have read and heard many times, of the extremely rapid growth of science and technology during the last two generations; the great engineering accomplishments which, while providing conveniences and comforts of life, have at the same time completely transformed and complicated our environment; the specialization of professional activity; the failure of social sciences to keep abreast of changes and provide a rational basis for social growth and development; the rising specter of war; and the consequent state of precarious equilibrium in which we now find ourselves. Suffice it to say that these rapid changes of environment which have allowed no time for organic readjustment have given rise to forces that are stressing the very fiber of our social and economic structure and confounding the minds that are try-

* From the *Carnegie Magazine.* The first three paragraphs are from "Future Demands upon Professional Education" (September 1936); the last, from "Education and Government" (January 1937).

ing to understand them. We are driving down a winding, branching, technological highway with the accelerator pressed to the floor and with conflicting hands grabbing at the wheel. We skid at the curves, the car creaks, and we become panicky. As the road branches we become confused, yet we must go on. But alas, when we reach a long stretch of straight road downgrade, we are all thrilled again and forget that there are more curves and more branches ahead. So far we have survived this high-speed, aimless journey, but at some future curve our car may burst under the strain of excessive centrifugal forces or skid off the highway, or, in our confusion and conflict at the branch of the road, we may crash.

As one reviews in history the processes by which we have reached our present state, surveys the trends of thought and activity in contemporary life, and in the light of these peers into the future, does one find anything in this entire span that would indicate that we are not merely repeating in a new cycle the old ups and downs of great civilizations? Are we now blessed with any new element not possessed by previous peoples that would lend the hope that we are not headed toward a Spenglerian doom? . . .

The hope lies in education. It lies in the possibility that our oncoming generations will be given the opportunity to prepare themselves adequately for the responsibilities ahead of them. It lies in the possibility that those who are responsible in education will be disposed to readjust their thinking about objectives and develop programs that will cultivate minds equal to the future; and that their efforts to this end will not be hampered.

a. *Is there wasteful phrasing in this selection?*
b. *Are there any "elegant variations"? (Keep in mind that these paragraphs are necessarily written in a somewhat more formal prose style than would be found in a letter or memorandum.)*
c. *Are there any heavy connectives for which effective alternatives are available?*
d. *What is the function of the long comparison at the end of the second paragraph? Could it be eliminated without reducing the effectiveness of the passage?*

6

Here is the full memorandum the first paragraph of which is discussed on page 45.

We received a telephone call from Mr. Herbert J. Jones of the Barton

Aluminum Company late this morning, in which he reported among other things that he and various other Barton people have been carrying on a series of discussions with one Dr. Nash of one of the firms in the field of investments from Los Angeles. Dr. Nash was quoted as having said that he was interested in Lofton but also that he would very much like to be introduced to certain important people from Lofton in various areas so that he could discuss certain matters with them, all leading to the possibility, he hoped, of learning more with reference to this company than he now knew, and that at firsthand rather than from our publications or from written reports or the usual financial statements and analyses.

Mr. Jones very kindly suggested that he might introduce Dr. Nash to various people at Lofton sometime when he may return to Chicago on a possible future trip and his telephone call to this writer was intended to see if the undersigned would be available to see him and to discuss with him matters of mutual interest and concern. This writer explained to Mr. Jones that both he and Don Chevrolet would be out of town from May 13 on and so would not be available for some time after that should Dr. Nash arrive soon after that date but that you would not only be available but would also be more than happy to meet with him and provide for him, either orally or in writing if he so desired, whatever information he needed for his purposes.

This memorandum is to inform you concerning this writer's telephone conversation this morning with Mr. Jones so that in the event that you yourself should get a telephone call from Mr. Jones in this same connection you will have been forewarned and thus will know what has happened thus far in this matter and what is expected of you.

Materials for Revision

The following items contain examples of certain errors discussed in this chapter. Revising them will reinforce your understanding of the problems involved and your ability to recognize similar mistakes and to avoid making them in your own writing. The items have been arranged in groups, each of which represents a specific type of error.

A

1. During January this product was in the process of being evaluated.

2. It was at this point that this office wrote a letter to Mr. M. Smith at Los Angeles.
3. Recently our New England representative, Roger Bacon, called at your office but was unable to see you inasmuch as you were not there when he called.
4. We have been informed by the Carryall Agency that they are holding the above order due to the fact that upon its receipt it was refused by you. The reason for this was no doubt due to the express COD charges involved.
5. Please let me have your comments as early as possible in order that I may be in a position to total shipments made to Hoboken on the exchange agreement for the month of April.
6. Under additional information on this credit memorandum you state that you actually received 353 tons. When issuing this credit memorandum you failed to show also the number of tons ordered to date. We are withholding process on this memorandum until you supply us with the number of tons ordered to date.
7. However, upon receipt of your June 30 invoice covering this transaction we found that we were billed in the amount $11.00 for this replacement panel, which I presume is the list price, but we were not favored by a resale discount to which I assume we are entitled. I believe we are entitled to a 20% resale discount privilege on replacement parts of this nature in accordance with your current discount schedule.
8. It will yield an oxide equally as active as the original preparation.
9. The current situation with respect to tests of this substance is that it is being investigated in at least ten laboratories in this country and six other papers concerning its properties are known to be in the process of being written.
10. The purpose of this report is to give a breakdown of the types and amount of communication carried on by business executives. The data presented in this report is an estimate derived by personal observation in the Chicago area.
11. You will also note that we have billed you for the 3 per cent Use Tax on the Pliagloss shipped into Tennessee. This is in accordance with your purchase order.
12. Please find enclosed a descriptive parts list of the Cardinal Refractor, our Order No. 87654. You requested this in your letter of June 25, 1954. We hope the attached parts list will prove satisfactory.
13. The use of speech is also to supplement the other types of communications and is carried on with other engineers, draftsmen, technicians, manufacturing personnel and suppliers.
14. Our bimonthly house organ is sent to heads of departments and offices of those having occasion to purchase or utilize safety equipment.
15. On the question of making use of television spot announcements, we do not know the reasons for trying to obtain time for such announcements at

this time since it is the current policy of this company to restrict the advertising on BX-16 to the medium of radio.

16. The writing done by engineers here is mostly in the form of technical proposals to the customers. This takes place during contract negotiations.
17. The mirror is large and may become dirty or cloudy or may be scratched by frequent cleaning, with the result that a clear image is seldom seen.
18. In regard to the test results to be obtained by your laboratory, it is requested that a statement of these results be forwarded to us.
19. In your letter of May 31, 1954, you stated that you have received the 1 only No. 3546 Wash-All without the cover. You also informed us that you have received a quotation for this item on which we quoted you a price of $145.00 for this Wash-All with the cover included.
20. The major portion of communication consists of actual conversation. This is divided up into conversation in person and conversation by telephone.
21. The filling out of the personnel forms was accomplished without delay.
22. We are pleased to advise that we expect to make shipment of your truck by the middle of December.
23. It is amazing at how much I've learned in this small amount of time. By this remark not only do I mean that I have learned quite a bit about the company but that I have learned quite a bit about myself.
24. Additional interviews with potential customers are currently in progress which will provide more useful customer data. These interviews will be completed in a period of approximately two months.
25. Mr. Brown indicated that it is his information that it requires $700 per trainee for equipment to train each individual under our present method of operation.
26. This particular week's work consisted of five projects, that is five different projects were considered during the selected week.
27. Because of the fact that the State of Ohio requires the exemption to be entered in a definite form we have taken the liberty of partially filling in the attached form in the prescribed manner.
28. This is a four-week school which is supposed to introduce us to the basic fundamentals of the art of salesmanship as it is practiced in the company.
29. Will you please advise us as to your recommendation regarding the continuation of these interviews.

B

1. Will you please advise us as to your recommendations regarding the retention of these two trademarks.
2. The current situation with respect to X-2 transistors is such that our entire production is being consumed in the domestic market.

3. It appears that Remco Standard is in line for a credit in the amount of 2000 pounds.
4. With respect to the use of No. 6 Filament, it is my understanding that this supply is preempted for light bulb manufacture.
5. As requested in your letter of November 1, 1956, we have checked the attached folders on Titan Pipe Wrenches, Solway Roofing No. 25, and Cello-lath Siding for changes or corrections which might be desirable before reprinting. Places where we believe that changes would be desirable are indicated in the attached folders and described below.
6. They have available a Norton scale; but because of the difficulty in operating the instrument the laboratory personnel do not use it for control testing. The difficulty in operating the instrument appears to be caused by a defect and arrangements have been made to have the equipment checked for defects by Webster representatives.
7. The Construction Division, in addition to its unexpected new business, also has benefited from favorable upward revisions to the profits on four contracts.
8. With respect to the improvement of chicken pie quality, it is important that a small amount of thyme and rosemary be incorporated in the gravy before it is poured over the meat so that the resultant chicken pie will be more satisfactory to the taste.
9. Foam rubber sales were the lowest of any month so far this year as a result of the softened market, occasioned by the drop in demand during the new automobile changeover.
10. We wish to thank you for your letter of September 21, in reference to Pliaform for Italy.
11. It should be noted in explanation, however, that the increase in earnings due to the replacements is approximately $10,000.
12. In view of the foregoing, we must tell you that Montana-Weld is not prepared at this time to continue further their negotiations in this matter.
13. The difficulty of arranging details will lay in the point at which we can make an exchange of Liquiflux for the bagged material taken into Mansbridge.
14. Exhibit 2 is a letter which is in response to a one-sentence assignment in the minutes of the July 1 Division Operating Committee meeting.
15. We cannot find any reference on your order as to when shipment is required.
16. It is anticipated that these units will be replaced on the basis of being worn out by 1956.
17. A check with Smith and Jones indicates that your present meter range can be increased to 3600 gph (60 gpm). This will provide for a 20% increase in range over the existing meter.
18. The new-formula Pliafilm 32 is ~~very superior to the~~ old formulation in stability.

19. Please advise immediately if this is in agreement with your desires.
20. One buyer should be added to the payroll using the specifications as out-~~lined to you~~ ~~at~~ of our recent conference.
21. The proposed installation on appropriation 36202–465 was not figured on the basis of vacuum. This appropriation is definitely a minimum investment installation.
22. ~~We wish to give you~~ Here is the following information concerning this job in order that you may arrange for the next state inspection.
23. At the present time, it is now necessary when teletyping orders to the Division Order Section to confirm the order on one of our regular order forms, T-3 or T-10.
24. In connection with your request that we ship you an additional premium to replace the one which had not arrived at the time you wrote your letter, we should like to give you the following information in connection with this matter.
25. In the future, ~~we would appreciate it if~~ please you would show under additional information if the prepaid freight bill is to be attached to the invoice.
26. ~~In summary~~, we suggest that all branches be immediately contacted regarding the matter of inspection of inventory reports so that they may be ~~advised of our desires~~. know what we want
27. The three prints of Drawing 142536 forwarded with our letter dated January 31 and the drawings furnished here~~with~~ are for your information and use. It is not necessary that you return the drawings unless you have any changes or comments ~~which you care to transmit to us by way of marked up prints~~.
28. ~~In regard~~ About to the affidavit to be ~~executed~~ done by Rivers & Martin it is requested that one executed and sworn copy be returned to us.
29. We are ~~now~~ trying to ~~establish~~ learn whether or not the two 30 H. P. electric motors for which it was necessary to cancel our order with Reddy Electric can properly be considered as specialties and we are ~~currently~~ awaiting an answer from Reddy Electric~~, to our most recent communication with it on that subject~~.
30. The activities of our group during the month were ~~concerned with~~ about the annual closing of the company records.
31. Early in November, a second report will be ready for inspection in which will have been incorporated a number of changes aimed at making the information in the report of greater usefulness to the Board of Directors.
32. Of the ~~remaining~~ left property, that on Webster Avenue is in ~~the process of being~~ being acquired by the Jones Realty Corporation.
33. During January representatives of this section visited three plants ~~for the purpose of~~ to performing audit functions~~. In addition to performing audits at company plant and contract locations, personnel of this section~~ audited various buildings submitted by subcontractors and other vendors.
34. Fabricators ~~in turn are faced with the condition where~~ their anticipated

fourth quarter orders have been reduced as much as 35%, with more likely to come.

35. Last April we ~~had~~ requested that the procedure for paying subsistence to Contract Sales Inspectors be reviewed ~~to determine~~ whether or not Form 1088 would be necessary. ~~We have not been advised regarding~~ the method used to pay subsistence in Contract Sales and suggest this be investigated ~~promptly so~~ that the necessary records may be reviewed and Forms 1088 ~~completed by~~ the January 31 deadline.
36. The property of anthracene which makes it ~~desirable~~ in this use is ~~the fact~~ that it forms a eutectic mixture with TNT.
37. In cases such as T. A. Warren has described, we have found that a corroded line at one spot ~~is~~ usually ~~an indication that~~ the entire header will begin to fail at intervals. ~~For this reason~~ we hesitate to recommend spending money on replacing short sections, ~~when the entire line is probably due for replacement. By~~ patching the line as the corrosion occurs, ~~the end result~~ is ~~usually far from~~ satisfactory, and entails ~~numerous~~ shutdowns, ~~etc.~~ We feel that the condition of the line should be checked at several other points ~~in order to~~ to find out ~~whether~~ the above statements are correct. In any event, we would not recommend the installation of an underground steam line designed the way the existing line is installed, which consists of a 2″ inner-pipe line insulated with sponge felt encased in a 6″ pipe jacket.
38. This assignment of four weeks duration terminated last Friday.

C

1. Refrigerator sales were down largely due to the fact that other manufacturers were offering extra discounts which the division generally did not meet.
2. Financial studies were made of a number of companies with respect to possible acquisition by Thompson.
3. In view of this experience, it is recommended that this limitation of the test be recognized.
4. During January this procedure was in the process of being evaluated.
5. I called on the subject company with regard to their inquiry on aluminum panels.
6. Also attached is a Performance Bond in amount of $5000 and a Payment Bond in amount of $1000.
7. I have now reviewed the original survey on crystal products by Quartz and Quartz, Inc., along with subsequent reports.
8. Should you have questions in regard to the above, we will be glad to go over them with you.
9. At the present time the baking time is 10 to 13 minutes.

10. We will not approve GeeRock for use in conjunction with our bonded built-up roofs due to the fact that it is extremely light in weight.
11. Our 39° Phenol meets all specifications of U. S. P. Phenol with the exception of color.
12. As you will note, the sulfur contents of the acids are all in the order of about 0.004%.
13. After this is accomplished, then you and I can review the whole matter and come to a decision.
14. Pliagloss can be expected to leave the furnace in the neighborhood of 600° F.
15. A meeting was held at the New York studios for the purpose of determining the new price ranges required as a result of the increase in the cost of film.
16. We wish to thank you for your letter of June 21 in reference to the three books which we sent you.
17. In such an organization almost daily conversations are held with the laboratory technicians in regard to the engineer's project.
18. Evanston suffered a $12 thousand loss in connection with the addition to inventory of some low valued raw material, and Denver sales fell 8 percent at a time when our chief competitor was advertising heavily in local papers.
19. To summarize the above, we find 3 coding errors by the Accounting Department and 2 by the Sales Department.
20. At the same time the engineer must confer with the Sales Engineer in regard to customer specification problems.
21. My training began with a two week orientation program that gave me a general insight into the company. After the two weeks were finished I was sent to Chicago.
22. Regarding our experience, we have produced Napthair for a number of years taking only ordinary precautions which should be taken with any aromatic compounds.
23. We cannot find any reference on your order as to when shipment is required.

4. Business Jargon

A businessman today cannot be content merely to satisfy a customer's needs. He must anticipate them. Nor can he allow his company to settle stolidly into an unimaginative routine. He must watch trends, look for new areas of expansion and diversification, insist on a sound program of research, and sponsor all sorts of training programs. In short, he must be a creative, effective executive.

Too often, however, his own writing and the writing in his company do not reflect this effort to keep well ahead of the competition. On the contrary, they are likely to be full of awkward, old-fashioned hackneyed phrasing. The businessman who prides himself on his secretaries' electric typewriters, who insists that his training director and salesmen use audio-visual aids, and who reads books about group dynamics all too often writes in language far behind the times.

Rubber-stamp Phrases

Here, for example, is a letter written by a man holding a responsible position in a large company:

> Dear Harry,
>
> We wish to acknowledge your letter, December 29, and are glad to have the opportunity to give you a report on the picture currently displayed by our crystal ball.

There would seem to be little or no possibility of significant changes in the price structure between now and April 30, when the current government regulations expire. Whether or not Congress will pass legislation to extend these regulations beyond April 30 is the $64,000 question, with the pros and cons pretty well balanced. . . .

Please advise us if the foregoing is in need of further clarification.

Very best regards for the New Year.

Yours very truly,

JOHN P. SWINSEL

Mr. Swinsel's analysis of the problem, which we have omitted above, indicated an alert, perceptive mind. Our personal interview supported that impression. His associates and superiors shared it. The phrasing of his letter, on the contrary, suggests a routine individual.

Mr. Swinsel knows his reader well enough to call him by his first name, yet he begins with the coldest, most commonplace stereotype imaginable. What is the point of the opening statement: "We wish to acknowledge your letter"? The reply *is* acknowledgment. If the date that follows is important, certainly it can be worked in without the six introductory words.

The rest of the opening sentence is as bad:

> are glad to have the opportunity
> to give you a report on the picture

Harry may find meaning in Swinsel's assertion that he is "glad to have the opportunity to" answer his question. He may, *if* he bothers to read that far. Chances are he will not. When he sees the standard expressions that he has seen every day since he went into business—"rubber stamps" they are usually called—he will skip to the second paragraph.

It, too, opens with a series of rubber stamps:

> There would seem to be
> little or no possibility
> significant changes in the price structure
> whether or not
> the $64,000 question
> the pros and cons

The last two paragraphs Swinsel transfers intact from several thousand previous Swinsel letters:

Please advise us
if the foregoing is in need of further clarification
Very best regards

Let us look at John Swinsel's problem for a moment. A customer with whom he is friendly wants to know what Swinsel and his company think about the possibility (1) that the approaching expiration of certain government regulations will affect prices and (2) that the regulations will be extended. Swinsel obviously wants to write a friendly, informative letter. Why not something like this?

Dear Harry,

We've been doing our share of puzzling over the problem that you posed in your letter of December 29. All I can say is that we do not expect prices to change before April 30 and that we have no clue to whether Congress will extend the regulations beyond that date. Actually, the evidence on Congress is contradictory and evenly divided. . . .

If there is any other way that we can add to your confusion, please let me know.

Don't let the price problem spoil your holidays. Have a fine New Year.

Sincerely,

The rewritten letter is shorter than the original, it gives the reader the information that he wants in the very first paragraph, it is friendly and unassuming, and it does not sound as if it had been written by a robot. It suggests that the writer is really thinking about what he is dictating.

Rubber-stamp Openings

The rubber stamp identifies the man who does not bother to think when he writes. Using this device, a man does not have to think—at least not when he is writing the parts of the letter which he finds hardest to phrase. What happens when the rubber-stamper sits down with his secretary or his dictation machine and a pile of letters to be answered? He plucks the first letter off the pile. His secretary waits with pencil poised, or he holds the microphone with his thumb on the switch. First problem: How

to start? Obvious solution: Grab the nearest appropriate cliché. What, then, comes out?

> In reply to your letter of . . .
> This is in reply to your letter of . . .
> In line with your letter of . . .
> As requested in your letter of . . .
> Complying with your request of . . .
> With regard to your letter of . . .
> In accordance with our telephone conversations of . . .
> In reference to your request of . . .
> Confirming our conversation of . . .
> Reference is made to your letter of . . .
> We have before us your letter of . . .
> We are in receipt of your letter of . . .

The list is long and the phrases familiar. And though each of these routine phrases serves two functions—it introduces a date and it gets the letter started—the date may not be necessary and there are better ways of getting into a letter.

Toward Effective Openings

A few seconds of thought will help the writer to avoid rubber-stamp openings. At the very least, he can thank his correspondent for his letter instead of merely "replying" to it or "acknowledging" it. Instead of

> In reply to your letter of June 20 . . .
> We wish to acknowledge your letter of June 20 . . .

he may say

> Thank you for your letter of June 20.

Even such an opening, courteous though it is, still does little more than say to the reader, "I am about to answer the question you raised in your letter of June 20. Are you ready?"

There are, of course, common rubber-stamp openings for which a simple "thank you" cannot appropriately be substituted. For example:

> In accordance with our telephone conversation of June 30, 1956, there is forwarded herewith one (1) copy of our Drawing #654123.

Here a direct, conversational approach will have a good effect on the reader:

> Enclosed is (*or* Here is) the copy of our Drawing #654123 that I promised you over the phone on June 30.

The second sentence includes the date of the telephone conversation, an item which should be recorded, perhaps; but it does not give the date undue prominence by building a pretentious platform of prefabricated, wooden phrases under it.

Most opening sentences, however, can be made to move even more quickly. Instead of

> This is in reply to your letter of January 6 regarding the Burden fuses which you supplied on the above purchase order. I wrote to our customer in an effort to have him reconsider and accept this material.

the writer may say

> When we received your letter of January 6, I wrote to our customer to persuade him to reconsider and accept the Burden fuses which you supplied on the above purchase order.

Certainly a sales letter which begins

> We wish to acknowledge your letter of March 6 regarding the availability of Stolene Lubricating Oil. We can ship the thousand gallons you need on March 10.

might better begin

> We can ship on March 10 the thousand gallons of Stolene Lubricating Oil about which you inquired in your letter of March 6.

Note that the first three words give the reader the information he really wants and put him in a mood to be glad he is dealing with such an efficient company as the one from which this letter comes.

Another awkward opening:

> We have before us your letter of June 20, relative to the sample of Towanda Brick which has been sent to you for examination. In the last paragraph of your letter, you tell us that you would like to know the temperature to which the brick is heated, and we are informed that it is retained in the oven for a period of 70 hours at a temperature of 1250°C.

might be rewritten:

> The Towanda Brick, about which you asked in your letter of June 20, is baked for 70 hours at 1250°C.

One more example will show the extent to which unthinking reliance on rubber-stamp openings can be carried:

> In reference to a recent letter from Mr. Zaroff of Zaroff Engineering here in Chicago concerning the subject heat control, he has informed me that your company handles heat controls.

Here the writer is referring the reader to a letter which he has never seen and which is of no concern to him. Setting up a useless repetition, he even reports the subject heading of the irrelevant letter: heat control. This writer's rut has become a chasm.

The Marathon Opening Sentence

Rubber stamps not only make the writer sound like an unimaginative clerk; they often force him into long, stringy opening sentences which attempt to summarize everything said in a letter to be answered or everything that took place at a meeting. Here is an example:

> In reply to your letter dated January 3, 1957, and in confirmation of the agreement reached with your Mr. Box by phone today, it was agreed that we would accept billing in the amount of $1,808.72 which is the total amount of the costs incurred by you in installing the replacement gear on the first of the two grinders which we furnished under the subject contract, but that the costs which will be incurred by you at a later date in the replacement of the ring gear on the second grinder will be divided equally between French and Brindley.

Without the rubber stamp, the writer would be able to say the same thing much more simply:

> By phone today, your Mr. Box and I discussed the problem you raised in your letter of January 3, 1957. We agreed that:
>
> 1. Brindley would pay the $1,808.72 cost that French incurred in installing the replacement gear on the first of the two grinders which we furnished under the subject contract;
> 2. French and Brindley will share costs when the ring gear on the second grinder is replaced.

Why Standard Openings Die Hard

Why does a writer come to rely on rubber-stamp openings? One reason, as we have already suggested, is that they make it unnecessary for him to think before he begins to dictate. As George Horace Lorimer's self-made merchant said more than fifty years ago: "I remember reading once that some fellows use language to conceal thought; but it's been my experience that a good many more use it instead of thought."*

Unfortunately, thinking involves effort, and most of us tend not to do any more hard thinking than we have to. Actually the amount of thought required for a meaningful opening is not great. And once a writer develops the habit of saying something in his first sentence, he finds that letters suddenly become easier to write and are much shorter.

In order to say something in the first sentence, however, he must concern himself, as he begins to dictate, not with the letter he is answering but with what he wants to tell his correspondent. Instead of saying to himself, "What did he ask me about?" or "What did he say?"—questions which automatically trigger a blast of clichés—the letter writer should be considering, "What do I want to tell him?" Then, in the process of the telling, he can work into his opening sentence the necessary reference to the letter he is answering.

Rubber-stamp openings are often substitutes for appropriate subject or reference headings. Many companies use subject headings in letters and almost all companies insist on them in memos. They eliminate the need for such stock phrases as "In reply to your letter of January 26 with reference to . . ." or "We are in receipt of your memorandum of April 22, 1957, and we are investigating the matter of Diesel replacement parts." All of the material in this last sentence may be placed in a subject heading:

> SUBJECT: **Diesel replacement parts**
> **Your memo, April 22, 1957.**

Another type of heading is

> REFERENCE: **Graham Winch Company**
> **Confirmation, phone call, Oct. 19.**

Use of such headings allows a writer to get right into his message: "We have done our best to persuade Elmport to ship parts to you within

* *Letters from a Self-made Merchant to His Son* (Boston: Small, Maynard and Company, 1902), p. 57.

3 hours of . . ." Or "You may tell Graham that if they can't ship 6 tons a day, we shall have to . . ."

But the subject heading must have all the information that is necessary. Consider this opening:

SUBJECT: Bordentown Plant

Dear Sir:

This letter is to report the progress on the subject plant. Johnson and Company have sand blasted . . .

Here the heading does only half of its job. If the heading had been written

SUBJECT: Progress on Bordentown Plant

the writer might have started with his second sentence.

Often in replying to a letter or a memo, a writer feels that to avoid confusion he must use the subject heading of the original. If he changes it, his reader's secretary may not be able to find the proper file to bring in to him, or she may misfile the letter. Therefore, many companies insist that subject headings not be changed. In such a situation, the solution recommended in the preceding paragraph would not help. A variation of it, however, would serve:

SUBJECT: Bordentown Plant
Progress Report

In most instances, only one or two short lines are necessary. The ex-summarizer, denied his lengthy opening sentence, should not take refuge in a bulky subject heading. It need not be—indeed, it should not be—a case history in outline. It should provide concise identification, short enough to be taken in at a single glance, of the real subject of the letter or memo that is to follow.

Rubber-stamp Closings

The conclusion of a letter also invites the wielder of the rubber stamp. If the writer asks a favor, the chances are that his letter will end in one of these ways:

Thank you for your cooperation.
Thank you for your kind cooperation in this matter.

Thank you for your consideration and cooperation.

Your cooperation will be appreciated.

Your prompt (*or* fullest) cooperation will be greatly (*or* deeply) appreciated.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

May we have your cooperation in this regard?

Once again, the list is long. The trouble with these routine statements is that no one reads them. They are interchangeable. One says as much as another—or as little.

When a writer has said what he has to say, he should stop. He should withstand the temptation to attach a rubber stamp. The complimentary closing ("Yours very truly," "Sincerely yours," or "Cordially") is sufficient tipping of the hat to say goodbye. If he does have a request, he should make it specific. If he wants an early or immediate reply, he may say, "I would appreciate your reply by July 1, the beginning of our next accounting period" or "Could you let us have the measurements as soon as you hear from your customer?" If he wants some other action, the writer should be equally specific:

We will appreciate it, therefore, if in the future you submit your orders on the enclosed forms.

I hope that you will be able to reschedule your shipments soon to help us solve our traffic problem.

Each different type of letter has its own set of stereotype endings. The unimaginative man who provides information will use one of these:

If we can be of further service to you, please do not hesitate to call on us (*or* to write us, *or* to let us know, *or* to let us hear from you, *or* to get in touch with us).

May we have the pleasure of serving you further?

If we can be of further service to you in any way, we will be glad to hear from you.

Please do not hesitate to write to us when we can help you.

If some such remark seems necessary, it should at least be made specific:

We will be happy to send you information about any of our other specials in which you may be interested.

I am always happy to discuss with you the installation of any of our equipment.

If you will send us charts of your other flow processes, we may be able to recommend additional money-saving equipment.

A rubber-stamp ending says nothing and often suggests that the writer is not really interested enough in the reader's problem to do much thinking about it. On the other hand, the specific ending suggests a writer who is alert and who is concerned enough about the reader's problem to stay with it until he finishes the letter.

A Sampling of Other Jargon

There are other rubber stamps—bits of jargon—that cannot be classified as easily as openings and closings. Letter writers in some companies, instead of saying "we expect," say "it is to be expected" or "it is to be anticipated." Instead of saying "probably," they say "it is not improbable" or "it is not unreasonable to assume"—presumably on the theory that a double negative is more discreet or more impressive than a direct statement.

"Advise" in particular has been so misused and overused in business that it has almost lost any real meaning. A man in industry today seldom says, replies, reports, states, suggests, ventures, or even tells. Instead he "advises":

I would like to be advised as to the equipment that was removed from our sandblast generator.

We are pleased to advise that our credit memorandum No. 47/12 was issued to you today.

The warehouse advised that they had only six bolts of this material in stock.

Mr. Faber will follow this and advise us as to whom they give the contract to.

As the last example indicates, rubber stamps often bring additional problems. Because "advise" is frequently followed by "as to," the writer ran into trouble: he had to do something with the extra preposition. If he

had used "tell," he probably would have written a perfectly simple sentence:

> **Mr. Faber will follow the negotiations and tell us to whom they give the contract.**

As engineers move into important positions in industry, they bring with them additional rubber stamps for their new colleagues. A piece of equipment, for example, cannot weigh "about" twenty tons. It must weigh "in the order of" twenty tons, or "in the order of magnitude of" twenty tons, or even "in the order of magnitude of about" twenty tons. The rubber-stamp engineer finds it impossible to say, "The temperature of the mixture is 300°F." He must say instead, "The mixture with respect to its temperature is 300°F."

In *Is Anybody Listening?*, William H. Whyte, Jr.,* identifies (not "advises that there are") "subglossaries of businessese." The subglossary for buck passing or hedging, for example, includes "in the process of," "at this time," "under consideration," "in the not-too-distant future," and "company policy." Each profession also has its own subglossary. Advertising men, for example, speak and write of the "hard sell" and the "soft sell," of "rolling an idea" this or that way so that someone can "kick it (*or* bounce it) around a little," of "trying an idea on for size," and of making a point that someone can "hang his hat on." They work strenuously to father these grotesque, unpoetic images, apparently under the impression that they suggest an exceptional talent in the speaker for producing slogans that sell products. Other subglossaries—the legal and the medical—have been widely criticized. Since the problems of subglossaries are related to levels of usage, the subject of the next chapter, we will consider them there.

The federal government warns its letter writers against "endeavor to ascertain" (for "try to find out"), "experience has indicated that" (for "we learned"), and "to be pecuniarily interested" (for "to have a financial interest"), among others. A long list in an Air Force manual on writing includes "afford an opportunity" (for "allow"), "take appropriate measures" (for "act" or "do"), "the fullest possible extent" (for "the most"), and "this headquarters is cognizant of" (for "we know").

The British seem to be having similar troubles. Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch wrote a now-famous essay "On Jargon" before World War I. George Orwell, in "Politics and the English Language" (1945), snorted at: "a not unjustifiable assumption," "leaves much to be desired," "would serve no

* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952, pp. 46ff.

good purpose," and "a consideration which we should do well to bear in mind." Even Winston Churchill joined the battle against rubber-stamp phrasing. As prime minister, he issued, on August 9, 1940, a memo entitled "Brevity":

> Let us have an end of such phrases as these: "It is also of importance to bear in mind the following considerations . . ." or "consideration should be given to the possibility of carrying into effect. . . ." Most of these woolly phrases are mere padding, which can be left out altogether, or replaced by a single word. Let us not shrink from using the short expressive phrase even if it is conversational.

As Sir Winston should have known, however, it takes less time to defeat an enemy in warfare than to defeat a rubber stamp.

Thirteen years later, W. E. Farbstein reported several similar items in *The New York Times* (March 29, 1953). For example, A. P. Herbert, a former Member of Parliament, spoofed official communications by translating Nelson's "England expects every man to do his duty" into traditional Admiralty rubber-stamp phraseology: "England anticipates that, as regards the current emergency, personnel will face up to the issues, and exercise appropriately the functions allocated to their respective occupation groups." Similarly, a British newspaper quoted a government employee who explained to his superior that a man who had been offered a particular job did not want it: "Verbal contact with Mr. Blank regarding the attached notification of promotion has elicited the attached representation intimating that he prefers to decline the assignment."

Why do people persist in using these rubber stamps—heavy phrases which have become institutionalized, circumlocutions which have become fads, old-fashioned habits of writing and turns of phrase which have become a part of the popular inheritance? Why? Some people really are stuffed shirts; pompous expressions suit their tastes (and reflect their personalities) admirably. Some people think that these expressions are polite, or discreet, or proper. Some have been instructed to use them by a superior. But probably most people use them because they see them frequently in incoming letters and in the letters of their associates. We have even heard them warmly defended by a businessman who insisted that he preferred not to have to think at all when he wrote a letter.

Many people, though vaguely and uneasily aware that rubber stamps

are inefficient, do not know what to do about them. Some know, but are too lazy to break themselves of the habit.

There are many people in industry, of course, who recognize rubber stamps for what they are and avoid them: a letter written by such a person is fresh, imaginative, and direct; it reflects a keen mind and a friendly, attractive personality.

Illustrative Materials

1

Every office worker, of course, knows about (or "is not unmindful of the fact that there are") rubber stamps. Executives enjoy passing around sheets which deride them. Here, for example, is a jingle which points up the lack of imagination and humor that distinguish the rubber-stamp wielder.

We beg to advise and wish to state
That yours has arrived of recent date,
We have it before us, its contents noted,
And herewith enclose the prices we quoted.
Attached please find as per your request
The samples you wanted, and we would suggest,
Regarding the matter and due to the fact
That up until now your order we've lacked,
We hope you will not delay it unduly,
And beg to remain yours very truly.

And here is a caricature which laughs at the way rubber stamps are used to avoid or shift responsibility:

OFFICIAL PHRASE	TRANSLATION
With reference to	Whether it has reference or not, this letter must begin somehow.
Herewith are forwarded	Or not, as the case may be, but your office will be to blame if the enclosures are missing.
I approach the subject with an open mind	I'm completely ignorant of the whole subject.

OFFICIAL PHRASE	TRANSLATION
The management agrees	Two junior executives have reached a meeting of minds.
We are confident that	I have my fingers crossed.
Under consideration	Papers temporarily mislaid.
Under active consideration	Looking for the file.
Concur generally	I haven't read the paper and don't want to be bound by anything I say.
Please expedite	*Somebody's* got to do something.
Have you any remarks?	Can you give me any idea what this is all about?
Please give us the benefit of your current thinking	Got any ideas we can steal?
This will be borne in mind	No further action will be taken until you remind me.
In due course	Never.

2

Tom Smith is writing to a man he knows well enough to call "Tony":

Dear Tony,

I am in receipt of a letter from Mr. Thomas J. Robinson inviting me to attend the annual Awards Dinner of The Chamber of Commerce and requesting that my reply be forwarded to you.

I regret very much to advise that it will be impossible for me to attend this dinner, due to previous commitments, and it is necessary for me to be in San Francisco on that date.

My sincere best wishes to you for a successful luncheon.

Yours very truly,

/s/ Tom

THOMAS P. SMITH
VICE PRESIDENT

a. *On the basis of this letter, what kind of fellow do you think Smith is?*
b. *What elements in the letter help to create your impression of him?*
c. *How would you write this letter to "Tony"?*

3

The Chameleon

Whenever we walk into a business office we run into a man named Bob (or Pat, or Bill, or Mac—the name does not matter), a man whose warmth and friendliness immediately put a stranger at ease, who makes customers feel that it is great to do business with his company, who can talk easily to crane operators about baseball and to vice presidents about golf, a man whom one could classify only as a fine fellow. But if you talk to the plant superintendent in Wichita (or Hartford, or Sacramento, or Duluth) who has never seen Bob but receives a memo from him once a week, you discover that Bob is a cold fish and a stuffed shirt, a guy the superintendent hopes will never turn up at his plant.

What makes this difference? The answer is simple: when Bob writes, he puts on an entirely new personality, one he has pasted together out of letters his first boss wrote, a feeling that business letters should be "dignified," and his high-school English teacher's insistence that he use a "formal" style in his themes. This is a Bob none of his friends at the home office would recognize.

What would happen if Bob talked about business the way he writes about it? Well, let's listen in on a conversation in his office. A visitor has just entered:

TOM: H'ya, Bob!

BOB: Why Tom Smith, you old coot. How're they treatin' you? Haven't seen you since we tied one on that night at the last State reunion. How's Sally and the kids?

TOM: Fine, Bob. Say, you're lookin' great.

BOB: You too! Seen Charlie lately?

A few minutes of idle conversation and soggy memories follow. And then . . .

BOB: Whatcha doin' at Acme Electric, Tom?

TOM: Well, Bob, Thornburg Products sent me down here to find out if you fellows can give us a little help in working out a schedule which will guarantee us a thousand electric fans a week in May and fifteen hundred a week in June.

BOB: With reference to your request, Tom, I regret to inform you that as of this date it is not to be expected that there is likely to be a significant upward revision in our production of electric fans, which will result in any expectation of our being in a position to insure delivery of fans as of a particular date.

TOM: You mean you aren't making enough fans.

BOB: It is expected, on the other hand, that in view of the fact that our Sergovia plant is in a position such that in connection with electric fans there is a potentially favorable outlook with respect to production . . .

TOM: Sergovia may produce more fans.

BOB: . . . it is estimated that there is a possibility that summer production may be expected to be in excess of ten percent of that obtaining as of the present month.

TOM: Perhaps ten percent more, eh?

BOB: With respect to your inquiry, therefore, it cannot be assumed that this company is in a position to—

TOM: Thanks very much, Bob. You can't up production more than ten percent, so you can't guarantee delivery. Well, it never hurts to try.

BOB: On the basis of the evidence at hand, it would be my opinion that that is a sound conclusion.

TOM: So long, Bob. Thanks again.

BOB: If we can be of further assistance to you in this matter, please do not hesitate to call upon us.

4

Here is a memorandum of which the writer was very proud. Read it once at your normal reading speed.

TO: Mr. T. J. Mason, President — January 14, 1955
FROM: Surplus Product Sales Department
SUBJECT: XYZ Company

1. Your note of January 5 about the XYZ Company has been received and

we wish to advise that we concur on your opinion that a similar arrangement as undertaken by Underwood Company has no particular interest to this department. However, provided the circumstances are extenuated, it is apparent that some special credit arrangements could be made. We have a particular and definite interest in this customer, which is identical with other concerns with which we do business and that is to increase our sales, when and if the availability of accumulations warrant doing so, consistent with the demands and policies as set forth by your office.

2. Unfortunately, we are not in a position to give any assurance of what might be available in the way of secondary products, as our offers and sales will fluctuate with the availability of the product, consistent with other demands placed before us, together with obligations incurred with other customers. It is, however, assumed that, in the event a plan can be worked out with this customer, it would not involve future inventories being held at our plant, as this would not be possible, since all the available warehouse space we have is limited and is used exclusively in the preparation and shipment of prime products.

3. Since we are unable to forecast what may be available in the future in the way of sizes and classifications of secondary products, we believe that it can reasonably be assumed that due to our expansion program the amount of off-grade products encountered in producing primes will increase proportionally—or at least we expect that they will. We might say further that this condition was rapidly developing prior to the current stoppage, and it can reasonably be assumed that when operations are resumed, or soon thereafter a marked increase, certainly a noticeable one, of secondary products will occur. Therefore, for this reason, we anticipate an increase in our future offerings to this customer.

4. In view of the foregoing, and as soon as we are in receipt of the additional information and data required, we will be in a situation to make a prompt and complete analysis of our position; and we will inform you of our findings as well as of our decision.

J. C. JOHNSON

a. *After reading this memo once, what impression do you have of Mr. Johnson? Do you know what he has told the president? Without looking back at the text, try to jot down the points he made.*

b. *Now go back and study the memo carefully. Can you rewrite it so that it will give Mr. Johnson's opinions clearly and concisely?*
c. *What have you omitted in your revision? Why is it difficult to understand the original?*

5

In this chapter we have mentioned the jargon of the advertising man and the engineer. Every field has its own jargon. Here, for example, is a composite financial newsletter, each sentence of which is based on one that we have seen in print.

That the nature of the economy is changing is a widely accepted premise. The difference to date has been generally psychological other than in the sometimes barometric stock market. The extent of what is likely to follow in both degree and duration now, as always, must be a matter for conjecture. On the basis of present indications, however, and especially if consideration is given to last month's slight gains, there seem little grounds for undue concern. Aside from seasonal factors, the indication is strong that the downturn has been scraping bottom.

However it is probably as well to recall at this time that basic premise which states that no more dangerous pastime can be indulged in than trying to guess the bottom of bear movements. In some quarters there is a strong feeling that the November-December lows will hold on a number of stock situations.

Generally the outlook for significant upward revision of the economy this year is still uncertain and seems to hang on the extent to which customer buying is revived. Along this line there has been a considerable increase in the liquidity of retail business.

Under these confusing circumstances, it would be our opinion that a meticulous view should be taken of fundamental business developments and the technical performance not only of the list but also of various groups and individual issues. Broadening strength on the upside can be judged by ability to better fourth quarter highs; on the downside by resistance in the neighborhood of last year's lows.

a. *After reading this report once, do you know what the writer has said?*

b. *Try rewriting the passage in clear, direct prose.*

6

These are the opening paragraphs of an answer to a letter of inquiry from a customer.

We were very pleased to receive your letter dated October 23, 1957, inquiring further into our variable mixer.

As you may recall, we built this pilot-size unit under contract to The Brown Construction Company for use in their experimental work at Grenoble, California. Completion of this unit in our shops took somewhat longer than we had anticipated at the time we had written to you, leaving us with practically no time for preliminary testing in our shops. As it turned out, we had time only for our necessary tests before the unit was shipped. Instead of gaining the valuable experience over a wide range of services, our tests were limited to the mixing of cement. We were very sorry that we were not able to have you here for a demonstration of our machine. We are happy to report that our success with this machine in mixing cement was to a very satisfactory degree. Due to its location in California, we have not had the opportunity to follow closely the results they are getting in their service. Inspection of the machine at this location probably also would be inconvenient for you. Since this program of making variable mixers is a relatively new field for our Service Products Department, we are currently giving serious attention to moving into this field with production-size machines. We realize that there are many economic and technological problems involved in undertaking a full-scale development program, involving major expenditures of capital. . . .

a. *What impression do you have of the writer of these paragraphs?*
b. *What is he trying to accomplish?*
c. *How many words does he really need to do the job? Try it.*
d. *How many rubber stamps can you find?*
e. *Why did the writer mangle the sentence beginning "We are happy"?*

Materials for Revision

The following items contain examples of certain errors discussed in this chapter. Revising them will reinforce your understanding of the problems involved and your ability to recognize similar mistakes

and to avoid making them in your own writing. The items have been arranged in groups, each of which represents a specific type of error.

A

1. We are in receipt of your letter of April 27, 1956, with regard to the color charts on the machinery enamels.
2. This is to advise you that on the recent sample of Pliaform coating for which you sent in a sample order for the subject company, we wish to give you the following information.
3. In reference to a recent letter received from Mr. White of White Engineering Company here in Pittsburgh concerning the subject heat control, he has informed me that your company handles heat controls.
4. With reference to your advertisement in the *Chemical and Engineering News* of December 26, 1955, please send a sample and your Bulletin D-56 on "Controlling River Pollution."
5. This is further in regard to complaints by the subject company on application of Protecto floor covering to floors in their Plainfield offices. They should be referred to Tom Neal in Baltimore.
6. This is in reply to your letter of June 8 regarding the Carbon Dioxide Absorption Bulbs which you supplied on the above purchase order. We wrote to our customer in an effort to have him reconsider and possibly accept this material.
7. With reference to your letter of June 30 we wish to inform you that the Acid Pump sent us for repairs against your purchase order No. 54–5614 has already been repaired by the factory and returned to you within the past week.
8. We are in receipt of your letter of June 29, 1954, informing us that 1 only x-72 Burette, 50 ml., was received broken in transit.
9. This is to advise you that about the recent shipment of plastic film for which you sent in a sample order, we wish to give you the following information.
10. We are in receipt of your Mr. Whim's letter of May 4, 1956 in reference to Invoice 74–8022 for correction, and your letter of May 15, 1956 with credit memo 72/926 for correction. We are returning these to you as you may want them for your files.
11. With reference to your letter of April 13 under the above subject, we wish to advise that all the district offices of our division have been canvassed for their opinions as to whether the Rite-Right or Rite-Well trademarks should be retained by our company.
12. In your letter of May 25 you requested permission to return 4 only T-417 Separatory Funnels, 4000 ml., and 4 only T-422 Separatory Funnels, 6000 ml., for credit. You have our permission to return these funnels to

our Cleveland office prepaid and upon receipt and inspection we will issue you full credit.

13. This is to acknowledge your letter of March 12, 1957, and thank you for calling to our attention the 3% Federal Transportation Tax billed in error on our invoice K16–390, covering shipments of lumber from Sacramento, California, to Long Island.
14. We wish to acknowledge and thank you for your inquiries dated December 20 concerning the subject equipment.
15. Reference is made to your letter dated February 20, 1957. We have complied with Items (1) and (3) of your letter by adding an expansion joint and changing the gauge.
16. Your letter of August 8 regarding the necessity of grinding down camshafts when several are employed in parallel. While your inquiry was directed to our Machinery Division Detroit Office, it has been forwarded to this office for response. Without presuming to write a book on the subject here, under the conditions you described and assuming that the camshafts are capable of withstanding a little grinding, we would not recommend grinding the camshafts.

B

1. With regard to our contract dated June 11, 1958, we wish to herein outline our understanding of the agreement reached during our recent discussion in your office concerning payment for work performed.
2. On the matter of the $500 overrun for the first quarter this seems to be very high.
3. I would like to be advised as to the equipment that was removed from our sand blast generator so your remote control feature could be installed.
4. Our equipment foreman, Mr. Tom Rand, is driving a truck to the site and it is anticipated he will arrive by March 22.
5. As far as the shipment of an 8000-gallon tank car for May 1, we feel certain that we will be able to make this shipment.
6. Due to the mobility of this equipment as well as labor savings, he feels he is of the opinion that hot coatings can be applied in place of cold coatings.
7. Mr. Mohler will follow this and advise us of whom they give the contract to.
8. With reference to your letter of December 20, we are pleased to advise that our Credit Memorandum 472/14 dated January 11, 1956, was issued in favor of your company in the amount of $48.82.
9. Attached hereto, is our brochure on Priam Sealing Compound which we trust that you will find of interest and considerable assistance to you.
10. In connection with our study of the control of mine fires by high expansion foams in some instances it would be desirable to generate and transport foam forming a semipermanent seal in an entry to prevent access of air to

the fire area. Can you advise us of the availability of plastic compounds that might be used to produce a stable foam having thin-wall bubbles ¼ to 2 inches in diameter.

11. Such publications afford the interested reader the opportunity to scrutinize the market carefully and with a minimum of expenditure of his time and energy.
12. We are expecting a return on investment in the order of $200,000.
13. I shall endeavor to ascertain their availability.
14. The column with respect to its size is thirteen and a half feet high.
15. We have taken your advisement under consideration, and although we cannot now give you a favorable reply we will communicate with you on the matter as soon as is practicable.

5. Levels of Usage

Much of the bad writing in industry today results from an attempt to be "proper." Many businessmen feel that the writing they do on the job should be "formal," easily distinguishable from spoken communication. In order to understand why so-called "formal" writing is no longer suitable to our needs, we must look briefly again at today's business climate.

Informality in the Business World

Relationships in business are everywhere becoming more personal than they were forty or fifty years ago. Many executives make a point of learning and using the first names of their employees. In meetings at which as many as five levels of authority are represented all personal reference is likely to be by first name. Heavy expense accounts attest to the amount of time businessmen spend with their customers in informal settings. Furthermore, business dress has become less formal: Collars are softer and lower; ties are more exuberant; belts and shoes are fancier; bands on summer hats are more colorful. Light, casual suits contrast with the stiff-jacketed clothes worn a generation or two ago. Business letterheads have changed too: One seldom sees today the heavy formal script, thick letters, curlicues, or heavy Gothic lettering that was typical a generation ago. Even the architecture and the interior decoration of office buildings reflect the trend. Simple lines, huge expanses of glass, colored panels, and attractive landscaping have re-

placed the heavy, cold pomp of nineteenth-century neoclassicism, with its impressive façades, friezes, and "gingerbread." Inside, colorful floor tiles, pastel walls, and indirect lighting give an impression of warmth and friendliness. Indeed, most executive offices today look more like dens than places of business.

Pressures to Preserve Older Forms

With all this pressure toward informality in business and industry today, why do many people still feel that writing should be "formal"? Probably the most important reason is the feeling that whereas speech is fleeting, a written record is permanent. On this record a man may be judged by his colleagues and his superiors. Therefore it should represent his best. Subconsciously many feel that their best must have the dignity of weight to support it. Our architects have shown us, however, that dignity can be achieved through simplicity, a lesson which many letter and report writers have not yet learned.

A second reason for the continued insistence on "formality" goes back to what many businessmen were taught about writing in school. In too many high-school classrooms, the use of "proper English" was—and still is—held up as a sacred duty for all who wish to achieve respectability in their writing. Quite literally, many students who did not use the standard formal phraseology, forswear the use of "I," and refrain from beginning a sentence with "and" were made to feel immoral. In the name of maintaining standards, many teachers preached that "there is only one way to use the English language" and that only one variety of English is "*good* English." Such remarks written on papers—often in red pencil—made a permanent impression. The student knew from his own experience that good spoken English, at least effective spoken English, is the English appropriate to the situation. He knew that no one spoke to an elder the way he did to a kid brother and that men used one pattern of English at the ball park and another in the law court. He did not have enough experience with writing, however, to know that roughly the same generalizations held for written language as for spoken language. So he allowed himself to be persuaded that all writing, except perhaps personal letters, should be "formal."

For most people writing or dictating is much more difficult than speaking. The very act of picking up a pencil, turning on a dictating machine, or calling in a secretary imposes a restraint, reminds the letter or report writer of prescriptions and taboos, and makes him conscious of what he is about to do—thus, too often, self-conscious. Most of us have been speaking since the age of two. Linguists tell us that we have mastered the major patterns of the spoken language by the age of five. Writing, however, comes much later and is often associated with clumsy juvenile grapplings with intractable pens or pencils, with messy ink blots, and with teachers' disapproval. Besides, no matter how much we write during our adult lives, we use spoken language many times as often as written language. We are, therefore, more comfortable with it.

Writing requires more careful attention than speaking. In conversation we can tell immediately whether our message is understood and what effect it is having. If the person to whom we are speaking does not understand, he will look puzzled or ask a question. We can then explain what we mean. If he frowns or if he begins to smile, we temper our speech accordingly. When we write, however, we cannot count on such immediate "feedback." We must put our sentences together with care and anticipate the reader's reaction. Feedback is more expensive and time consuming in written communication than in speech, since it takes the form of an additional exchange of letters or memos. Worse yet, failures in communication may cause delay, improper action, loss of a customer, or other difficulties.

Writing must be more precise, more accurate, and clearer than speech. Therefore, it is usually also more concise. It requires, like speech, appropriate vocabulary and style. Like the architect, the writer should adapt his design to the demands of the situation. The modern architect delights in allowing the lines of a building to reflect its structure. So should the modern writer. The modern architect strives for simplicity and propriety in the setting; he avoids decoration that is not integral to the design. So should the modern writer. The poetry of the George Washington Bridge is in the sweep of its cables and the obvious strength of its towers and supports. Its combination of ease and majesty reflects the ability of its designers to build functionally and with the greatest simplicity that their materials and the gap to be spanned allowed. Similarly, a piece of writing which reflects the content and organization of the thought it was designed to communicate is pleasing in itself. Attempts at ornamentation only clutter it up.

Formal English

The attempt to be "formal" is based on inadequate or misguided reasons. The pseudoformal prose of business is usually only a poor imitation of the prose used by good speakers or writers in genuinely formal situations. To see the difference, let us look at a piece of acceptable formal prose:

> A constitution, a statute, a regulation, a rule—in short, a "law" of any kind—is at once a prophecy and a choice. It is a prophecy, because it attempts to forecast what will be its effects: whom it will benefit and in what ways; on whom its impact will prove a burden; how much friction and discontent will arise from the adjustments that conformity to it will require; how completely it can be enforced; what enforcement will cost; how far it will interfere with other projects or existing activities; and, in general, the whole manifold of its indirect consequences. A thoroughgoing and dependable knowledge of these is obviously impossible. For example, although we can anticipate with some degree of assurance who will pay a steeply graded income tax and in what amounts, there is no way to tell what its indirect effects will be: what activities of the taxpayers in the higher brackets it will depress; if they do not work so hard, in what way they will occupy their newly acquired leisure; how any new activities they may substitute will affect others; whether this will be offset by a loss of the mellowed maturity and the wisdom of those who withdraw. Such prophecies infest law of every sort, the more deeply as it is far-reaching; and it is an illusion to suppose that there are formulas or statistics that will help in making them. They can rest upon no more than enlightened guesses; but these are likely to be successful as they are made by those whose horizons have been widened, and whose outlook has been clarified, by knowledge of what men have striven to do, and how far their hopes and fears have been realized. There is no substitute for an open mind, enriched by reading and the arts.

In order to understand and appreciate this passage, we must examine: (1) the context in which it appeared; (2) its characteristics; (3) how it differs from the pseudoformal prose of the business world.

This paragraph was taken from a speech by Learned Hand, one of the most eminent jurists in the United States. When it was delivered (on October 24, 1952), Judge Hand was eighty years old, had been a member of the bar for fifty-five years, and had just retired from the United States

Circuit Court after forty-two years on the bench. At the time he spoke, he had received honorary degrees from eleven colleges and universities in the United States and England; since then he has received several more. The address was delivered at the Eighty-sixth Convocation of The University of the State of New York, the body that governs higher education in New York State. It was later reprinted in the *Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors.** Judge Hand's topic was "Freedom and the Humanities," an inquiry into "the preparation of citizens for their political duties."

The topic, then, was a solemn one, had important philosophic overtones, and was vital to the interests of the audience which attended and to the one which read it in the AAUP *Bulletin.* In addition, both audiences represented a most highly educated segment of the American population and one of the most respected. Finally, the speaker was a highly educated and respected man, venerated for his years as a judge and public servant, for his knowledge of the law, and for his wisdom. To many, he had become a symbol of the majesty of the law. Audience, topic, and speaker thus joined to provide a context in which formal language was thoroughly appropriate.

Genuine formal English has several characteristics that distinguish it from the other levels of usage: its vocabulary, the construction and length of its sentences and paragraphs, and, often, its punctuation. Many words and phrases in Judge Hand's address are not found in everyday speech: *statute, regulation, prophecy, impact, anticipate with some degree of assurance, activities . . . it will depress, acquired leisure.* Some phrases even border on the poetic: *manifold . . . of consequences, mellowed maturity, widened horizons.* Both vocabulary and phraseology are rich and dignified.

The sentences of Judge Hand's paragraph are unusually long and complex, as is the paragraph itself. The second sentence has 77 words and the fourth has 93. Even though the paragraph includes a 10-word sentence and a 14-word sentence, the average sentence length is slightly more than 43 words. Compare that average with the average sentences in newspapers and magazines of wide circulation—10 to 20 words; and with the average of sentences in more serious books and periodicals, aimed quite often at professional audiences—25 to 30 words. Similarly, the paragraph length of 303 words compares with an average of 76 words in a lead editorial in *The New York Times,* 50 words in a report in *The Wall Street Journal,*

* 38 (1952–1953), 522–23.

56 in a *Reader's Digest* article, 85 in a *Time* news report, and 182 in a technical article.

The complexity of the punctuation in the paragraph from Judge Hand's speech reflects the complex organization of the paragraphs, phrases, and sentences.

——, ———, ——, —— ——, — "——" —— ——. ——, ———:
———; ———; ————; ———; ———; —————; ——, ————,
————————. ———————————. —————, ————————,
——————: ————————————; —————, ————————;
—————————; ————————————. ————————,
———————; ——————————. —————————; ————,
———————, ————, ————. ————————————, ————.

The second sentence has eight major sections, seven of them in parallel construction. Although the other long sentence (the fourth) has fewer major sections (five, four of them in parallel construction), the sections themselves are complex, one of them being divided into three parts. The unusually large number of semicolons is further evidence of complexity.

Adding to the density of the prose are smaller units arranged in formal patterns: *a prophecy and a choice, thoroughgoing and dependable, the mellowed maturity and the wisdom, formulas or statistics, hopes and fears; a constitution, a statute, a regulation, a rule.* By their rhythm, these balanced phrases add further to the impression of dignity and formality of the style.

If we were to alter or simplify the phrases and sentences, we should necessarily destroy the subtle shades of meaning in a carefully woven fabric of profound thought. Complexity here is not the result of an attempt to impress. Rather, the phrasing and sentence structure accurately reflect a complex and delicate arrangement of ideas about a problem of which many aspects must be considered simultaneously and in a precise relationship to each other. Cutting any of the sentences in two or three parts in an attempt to make them easier to read will distort the idea they convey. Removing a portion of any of the balanced phrases (*a prophecy and a choice, formulas or statistics, hopes and fears*) similarly distorts. Either action would be like breaking or removing a gear in a carefully and delicately integrated mechanism. Finally, this paragraph shows none of the characteristics—lack of understanding of the audience, wordiness, jargon, and unnecessary passive—discussed in Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 6.

Pseudoformal English

Now let us examine a sample of the pseudoformal writing that often appears in business today:

> Subsequent to our recent discussion in your office, we have reviewed our present situation with regard to the possibility of our submitting a proposal for the Thomasville project about which you inquired and regret to advise that at this time we are unable to quote.
>
> Our foregoing decision was reached after a thorough and complete study revealed that we are not currently in a position to be able to produce the engineering drawings within a period of time as indicated by you in your office to be acceptable.
>
> We trust that we will continue to be favored with your inquiries and that we will be better situated in the future to undertake such projects as you would care to propose.

What was the context in which this letter appeared?

The writer has the unhappy task of telling the reader, whose office he visited a few days before, that he cannot quote on the reader's proposal. Since the refusal will certainly not please the reader and may even seriously inconvenience him and his company, the writer should give the impression that he has sincerely and efficiently tried but that the task has proved impossible.

To see how poor the original was, compare it with the following alternative version:

> After our recent discussion in your office, I checked with my staff to see whether we could submit a proposal for your Thomasville project.
>
> A thorough study of our present commitments convinced us that no matter how we juggle them, we cannot produce engineering drawings for Thomasville by the date you have specified. I am very sorry, therefore, to have to tell you that we will be unable to quote.
>
> I hope, however, that you will continue to call on us. After we expand our engineering department this spring, we will easily be able to handle a rush job like Thomasville without sacrificing the thoroughness and efficiency on which this company has built its reputation.

The difference in effect between the two versions is immediately noticeable. The revised version makes the original sound cold, pompous, and inefficient. Note, for example, the difference in the type of phrasing used:

ORIGINAL	REVISION
subsequent to	after
we have reviewed	I checked
with regard to the possibility of our submitting	whether we could submit
a thorough and complete study revealed that	a thorough study convinced us
we are not currently in a position to be able to produce	we cannot produce
within a period of time as indicated by you in your office to be acceptable.	by the date you have specified
we trust	I hope
be favored with your inquiries	call on us

In each instance, the phrasing of the original is heavy and awkward but that of the revision is forthright and informal, as it should be in a letter of this type. The original averages 40 words per sentence; the revision, 20. Because the original conceals information in an undergrowth of verbiage, it suggests that the writer is more interested in excusing himself than in helping to solve the reader's problem. Furthermore, the revision, unlike the original, gives specific reasons why the writer is now unable to quote and why the reader should ask him to do so in the future. The over-all effect of the two letters is quite different: the original is likely to lose a customer; the revised version is likely to keep him.

These two examples point up the difference between appropriate and effective formal writing and pseudoformal business writing. Judge Hand's language was appropriate to himself, to the subject, to the audience, and to the occasion; the language of the business letter was not. Judge Hand's sentences were appropriately long and complex. The sentences in the original version of the business letter were long and complicated because they were artificially blown up. Judge Hand used long words because they were needed to say precisely what he intended. The writer of the business letter used "big" words unnecessarily. Judge Hand's paragraph reflects sobriety and integrity; the business letter reflects pomposity and inefficiency.

The Dangers of Pseudoformal Writing

One danger of pseudoformal writing was dramatized for us at the end of a communication seminar. The writer of a memorandum which the group had just analyzed approached the discussion leader and announced that we had solved an important problem for him. He was the production manager of his division, which has plants in various parts of the country. He knew the plant superintendents well; they entertained him at their homes when he visited their plants, and he often invited them to dinner at his house when they came to the home office. When he discussed problems with them face to face or even over the telephone, he got along with them very well. His letters, however, often produced irritated replies. "I couldn't understand," he said, "why the boys raised hell every time I wrote them a memo." The group's analysis of his memorandum had showed him the source of the irritation. While his speech and manner were easy and friendly, his memoranda were stiff and peremptory and had all the unnecessary heaviness of the pseudoformal letter analyzed above. "From now on," he said, "when I write to them I'm going to use a more informal style."

Without realizing it, many people in business and industry give the impression of being two-faced. Talking to a customer or a subordinate, they are naturally informal and friendly. Writing to the same person, they too often slip into a pseudoformality that projects an entirely different, and often irritating, personality. The contrast can make a customer or a subordinate uneasy—even though he may not know why he is uneasy.

The tradition of pseudoformality in business letter and report writing leads to another difficulty. Sometimes a writer uses a very informal word or phrase in a pseudoformal piece of writing, with results that are ludicrous. The Swinsel letter, which was examined at the beginning of the last chapter (p. 65), is a good example. Mr. Swinsel writes to "Dear Harry" and speaks of his "crystal ball" and the "$64,000 question." It sounds as if Harry is someone to whom he would like to write a friendly, informal letter. The tone of the letter, however, is "formal" and it contains such stuffy phrases as "We wish to acknowledge your letter," "are glad to have the opportunity," and "Please advise us if the foregoing is in need of further clarification." To anyone with a sensitivity to language, the mixture is amusing and suggests that the writer is using a tool which he cannot control.

Informal English

On rare occasions good formal prose is called for in business and industry, but usually the most appropriate level of usage is the informal. Informal English has many characteristics of good speech. It uses conversational words and phrases if they communicate exactly enough. (Note, for example, the use of "called for" in the first sentence of this paragraph.) Its sentences are considerably shorter than those in Judge Hand's speech. Those in the revised version of the business letter above averaged 20 words, as opposed to Judge Hand's 43. Sentences of good informal writing usually *average* from 18 to 25 words in length, though an individual sentence may contain three or 53 words. Informal writing seldom contains sentences as elaborately constructed as those in Judge Hand's paragraph. Most of our recommended versions of sentences, paragraphs, and memos are in informal English. Most fiction, newspaper writing, advertising, and nonfiction in magazines of wide circulation is written in informal English.

Here is a passage of good informal prose:

> People used to shy away from new words until they had "proved themselves a permanent part of the language." Dictionary editors watch new words in books and magazines and include them if they continue to be used. But users of the language need not be so hesitant. The use of a word should depend on its fitness rather than on its passing a probationary period, and acceptance by a dictionary should be a result of use. Obviously the name of a new invention or of a new social situation is needed immediately and should be freely used, though there may be a question of its exact form, as in *airplane-aeroplane*. There need be no hesitation about words like *televise, blitzkrieg, draftee, sit-down strike, candid camera, newscast*. Such words come from a need to name something. Some words for a time are overused, like *streamlined* and *stockpile* at present, but their life is usually short. . . .
>
> New words make their way rather slowly into more formal literary usage. But most writers today take a new word whenever it fits their meaning of it and is appropriate to their type of writing and will not trouble their readers. Occasionally they may even coin a word to serve their purposes.*

Notice how the author, Porter Perrin, gives the impression of conviction

* From Porter G. Perrin, *Writer's Guide and Index to English,* revised edition (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1950), p. 58.

and authority without the labored heaviness that makes for such difficult reading in pseudoformal prose.

On occasion, Perrin uses phraseology that has a slightly formal ring: *passing a probationary period* and *There need be no hesitation*. But he also uses the colloquial phrase *to shy away from*. His sentences are of different lengths, varying from nine to 35 words. Similarly, he employs a variety of sentence structures—simple, compound, and complex. But his sentences average only 19 words, and none is so involved as to be difficult to read. Here, then, is the writing of an educated man who doesn't take himself too seriously.

Vulgate

The third level of usage, which seldom appears in business writing, is commonly referred to as the vulgate, a term which does not imply vulgarity or necessarily suggest disapproval. It is simply a descriptive term used to indicate the language characteristics of the uneducated. Here is a sample:

> Tell ya, Sam. Trouble with old Tom is he don't keep his eye on the ball since his missus kicked the bucket. He didn't never used to be this way. Sure, he's tryin' all right. But every time he fixes up a motor he gets a valve in backwards, or he don't tighten some bolt or somethin' an' the darned crate falls apart soon as we crank 'er up. An' I'll be a cockeyed so-and-so if last week he didn't strip one down ta put in a new gasket. An' what did he do? He puts the cracked one back in an' puts the whole thing together again. Honest ta God, Sam, you gotta do somethin' or we're all goin' to go crazy.

Obviously, this is not the sort of language appropriate to the executive level in business and industry.

The Usage Continuum

The three levels of usage are not clearly stratified. Rather they form a continuum:

formal — **informal** — **vulgate**

The average person will have occasion to use English at most points on the continuum. At a ball game with his friends or with a customer he knows well, a man may use language closer to the vulgate than the informal. As a speaker at a testimonial dinner, he may use language closer to the formal than the informal. However, most of the language he uses, both oral and written, will fall somewhere in the broad area called the informal. As we have seen, a phrase from one level may sometimes be used for a special effect when the bulk of a communication is on quite a different level. The exact level is determined in each situation by the position of the reader, the position of the writer, their relationship, the subject matter, the result that the writer wants, and the general background against which all of these variables must be seen. Pseudoformality is an awkward and misguided attempt at formal prose in a situation which calls for informal prose.

Special Problems of Professional Writers

When one suggests simple, informal writing, he often runs into an objection. Men in certain professions insist that their work requires formal, intricate, heavy language patterns.

Technical Writing

Individual engineers and scientists often argue for such a special privilege. The profession as a whole, however, recognizes that most of their arguments are specious. Read, for example, what one representative from the aircraft industry said about training engineering students in technical writing:

> Actually the models, the standards, and the requirements (for technical writing) should be identical with those that the graduate should expect to encounter in the field—with one important exception: the meaningless chestnut that technical writing is "different" from standard writing should be extirpated. This argument is usually advanced by engineers who cannot write standard English and need an excuse for the stuff they do write. Technical writing is standard writing plus a small special vocabulary appropriate to the topic under discussion. All else remains the same; the requirements for

clarity, logic, readability, completeness, compactness, style are not changed.*

Directors of research often complain bitterly that their subordinates cannot write and that they have to spend too much time sorting out and recasting reports which come to their desks before they can send them on. Frequently we hear stories about good research men who are not promoted as fast as they might be because it is difficult to learn from their reports what they have accomplished. That rewriting by directors of research does make many reports more intelligible and that many engineers and scientists do write well indicates that scientific writing *can* be lucid.

The "horrible examples" of unnecessarily complicated writing that engineers and scientists pass around among themselves show that they do recognize the problem. The spoofs of technical writing that appear frequently in their journals indicate that they also understand which aspects of their writing cause trouble. Here is a paragraph from one such caricature:

> Forty-one manestically spaced grouting brushes were arranged to feed into the rotor slip-stream a mixture of high S-value phenylhydrobenzamine and five percent reminative tetryliodohiexamine. Both of these liquids have specific pericosities given by $P = 2.5C\ n6.7$ where n is the diathetical evolute of retrograde temperature phase disposition and C is Cholmondeley's annular grillage coefficient. Initially, n was measured with the aid of a metapolar refractive pilfrometer (for a description of this ingenious instrument, see L. E. Rumpelverstein in "Zeitschrift fur Elektrotechnistatischs-Donnerblitze," vol. vii), but to the present date nothing has been found to equal the transcendental hopper dadoscope. (See "Proceedings of the Peruvian Academy of Skatological Sciences," June 1914).

Here the writer is calling attention to several typical faults of technical writing:

1. Heavy use of highly specialized terminology,
2. Long parenthetical interpolations,
3. Unnecessarily long sentences.

Such pomposity is often as ridiculous as the sign over the door in a Boston hotel which reads, "This door is not an accredited egress."

Technical writing need not be so involved and heavy as to confuse readers. It may lean toward formality without being pretentious or tortu-

* Warren W. Wood, "Reporting through the Looking Glass," *Journal of Engineering Education*, 48 (1958), 724.

ous. Although only a chemist could understand the following paragraph, a layman can recognize that it avoids pretentious and overcomplicated writing:

> The isolation of 3,5-dibromonitrobenzene (VI) as a by-product from the Ullmann reaction of I presents no new features. The hydrogenolysis of halogen from aryl halides by copper and organic acids and by copper and tetralin have been demonstrated. But substitution of aromatic halogen by hydrogen has also been observed when no obvious hydrogen source was present. Hydrogenolysis has been reported as a side reaction to Ullmann coupling in several cases when no solvent was used; indeed, in one instance some hydrogenolysis occurred in an "inert" atmosphere. The fact that VI was isolated from I in the present investigation even when the mixture was carefully dried and protected from atmospheric moisture indicates that the hydrogen which replaced the iodine probably came from I or its products. It is significant, also, that the iodine atom of I was removed by hydrogenolysis, but no debromination product of I was detected.*

The sentences average 25 words. There are no convoluted sentences that suggest a boa constrictor negotiating a maze. Beginning a sentence with "but" and using such words as "indeed" and "probably" add an informal touch that lightens the style. Even without understanding the paragraph, a layman should be able to read it aloud with meaningful expression. The reader of a technical report or paper should not have to scout each sentence cautiously, to explore its intricate twists and turns, to weigh each word or phrase and plot it in its context as if he were drawing a map. The sentences should be short enough to be negotiable, the language technical only where absolutely necessary, and the "road signs" (*but, indeed, even, probably, also*) frequent and accurate enough to keep the reader from losing his way.

Legal Writing

Lawyers often plead the same sort of special privilege in using language that engineers do. Succinctness versus explicitness, a lawyer for one of the country's largest industrial concerns has told us, is an old legal problem. The enhancement of one very frequently detracts from the other.

* Robert B. Carlin and Edward A. Swakon, "Anomalous Ullmann Reactions. The Unsymmetrical Coupling of 2,6-Dibromo-4-nitroiodobenzene," *Journal of the American Chemical Society,* 77 (1955), 969.

Lawyers have found by experience that it is best to specify everything, even though doing so requires a great deal of qualification and much longer sentences. The actual loss of efficiency is not as great as one might imagine. In particular areas, such as purchasing, patents, or taxation, those directly concerned become so used to the jargon that they can read whole clauses and phrases at a glance. Controversies which arise can generally be settled by consulting the language in which an arrangement has been spelled out in detail. Most legal difficulties arise when the language is not sufficiently definite or explicit.

Let the lawyer continue in his own words. He writes:

> Let me give you a specific example from my field which illustrates this point quite well. A patent application may be refiled for any one of a number of reasons. These refile applications have names. A "continuation" application contains substantially the same subject matter as the parent case, and nothing more. Such a case is sometimes filed for reasons of legal tactics which I won't go into here. A "continuation-in-part" application contains all or a portion of the subject matter of the original application, plus some additional subject matter (i.e., the original invention has been improved). A "divisional" application contains only a portion of the subject matter of the parent case. Such an application is filed where the Patent Office holds that the original case discloses two separate inventions. Since a single patent application may only be directed to a single invention, a separate case must be filed for one of the two inventions if both are to be covered. In addition, a patent which has already been issued may in some instances be corrected or changed if, as issued, it contains a mistake. To do this, a second patent is issued which is known as a "reissue" patent.
>
> If Raleigh Manufacturing grants a license under one of its pending patent applications, it may be necessary, depending upon the circumstances, to spell out the effect of the license with respect to possible refile applications. A typical granting clause might read as follows:
>
>> Raleigh Manufacturing hereby grants to Company *X* an irrevocable, nonexclusive license under patent application Serial Number 100,000 and under any divisions, continuations, and/or continuations-in-part thereof as well as under any patent issuing on any of the same and/or any reissue of any such patent.
>
> As you can see, this makes a pretty complicated and involved statement, yet there is really no way to simplify it. If Raleigh Manufacturing simply granted a license under application Serial Number 100,000 and said no more, the licensee would have no protection if

Raleigh Manufacturing filed a "continuation" of this application and abandoned the original. And so, experience has shown in most fields of law that it is frequently necessary to go into greater detail than one might think necessary in order to make clear on the record just what the parties intend. Patent attorneys are so accustomed to the type of granting clause which I have set out above that they can take it in at a glance when reading it.

There are several matters for comment here. The lawyer's explanation and defense of the long and complex "granting clause" is certainly convincing. There are times when it is safest to load a single sentence as full of qualifications as possible to guard against any eventualities should a legal problem arise. Similarly, one can sympathize when a company refuses to simplify a passage in a labor contract which may seem obscure and unnecessarily verbose to the uninitiated. If the passage has been the subject of arbitration, a board has ruled on its exact meaning. A rewriting might cause the entire matter to be brought to arbitration again. Perhaps if the passage had been better written in the first place, arbitration would not have been required.

The lawyer's explanation is interesting for another reason. He is explaining and defending a complex 50-word sentence; and his explanation is quite technical. Yet his own language in the quoted passage is informal: the sentences in his first paragraph, for example, average 18.4 words; he uses the very personal *I, my,* and *you;* he uses the contraction *won't* instead of *will not;* and he uses such informal expressions as *go into* (first paragraph), *spell out* (second paragraph), *As you can see* (third paragraph), and *pretty complicated* (fourth paragraph). While some legal writing may have to be involved and difficult, much of it need not be. A good lawyer can adapt his style to the needs of the piece of writing at hand, as the lawyer whom we have quoted does so well.

Sales departments, particularly the people in them who make quotations, often continue to use unquestioningly legal formulas written many years before. When we asked one company about a standard (and particularly involved) legal clause that was included in all its bids, no one could remember when it was first incorporated into such documents, although some of the men had been sending out the bids for fifteen years. They had inherited the clause from an earlier generation and just continued to use it. In such a situation, a periodic check with the legal department is useful to see if standard legal passages can be simplified and made less formal. Long, heavy, and involved passages in an otherwise informal, well-

written quotation jar the reader and often seem as absurd as the confused levels of usage that we have examined above. If such passages cannot be simplified by the legal department, they can often be relegated to an appendix and merely recognized in the text by some such sentence as: "This quotation is subject to the attached 'Conditions of Sale.' "

Medical Writing

Doctors are not immune to the virus of pseudoformality. Here, for example, is the medical excuse of a student who asked to be relieved of physical education:

> **Miss Rose Tryon presents a third-degree weak foot with subsequent muscular malalignment of both legs and has been under our care since October 21, 1957.**
>
> **Any activity requiring long standing or walking or any gymnasium routine is definitely contra-indicated.**

There is no question, of course, about what these two paragraphs say. But they communicate more than the statement that Miss Tryon should be excused from physical education and the reason why she should be excused. The pseudoformality also suggests something about the doctor.

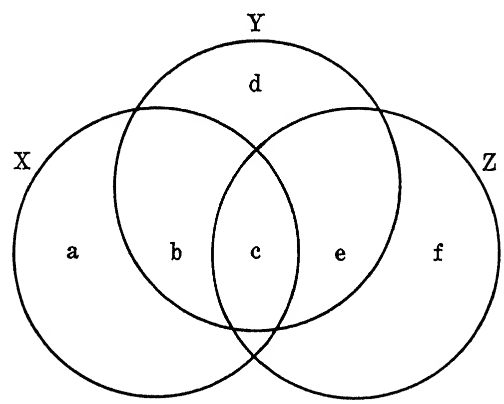
We could go on endlessly demonstrating pseudoformal usage in the various professions. Educators, for example, have their own subglossaries, as do sociologists, psychologists, historians, economists, government workers, and literary critics. They are as fond of pretentious prose as the man in the marketplace or the laboratory.

When any of these problems appears, other problems appear as well. If the reader flips through the pages of this chapter, he will note, in almost every example of inappropriate level of usage, mixed levels of usage, and pseudoformality, that the writer did not keep his audience in mind, that he used more words than necessary, that his writing was heavier than it needed to be, and that he used jargon and rubber stamps. Any one of these problems (and those which are discussed in the following chapters) not only obscures or prevents effective communication, but it invites—even obliges—other difficulties to appear. A writer of heavy, wasteful prose is generally prone to use jargon and is not sufficiently sensitive to levels of usage. The faults are like fleas: to harbor one is to invite the rest to appear.

Illustrative Materials

1

An effective way of illustrating the relationship of the various levels of usage is this diagram from The American College Dictionary:*



The three circles, *X, Y, Z,* represent the three sets of language habits indicated above.

X—formal literary English, the words, the expressions, and the structures one finds in serious books.

Y—colloquial English, the words, expressions, and the structures of the informal but polite conversation of cultivated people.

Z—illiterate English, the words, the expressions, and the structures of the language of the uneducated.

b, c, and *e* represent the overlappings of the three types of English.

c—that which is common to all three: formal literary English, colloquial English, and illiterate English.

b—that which is common to both formal literary English and colloquial English.

e—that which is common to both colloquial English and illiterate English.

a, d, and *f* represent those portions of each type of English that are peculiar to that particular set of language habits.

* Clarence L. Barnhart (ed.) (New York: Random House, 1956), p. xxvii.

2

Here are portions of two commencement speeches. Read them at your normal rate.

We all know that ours is a perilous period, a time of testing, that the old order is changing, that the sky is overcast and visibility low. And in this open season for adjectives and for seniors, on a hundred campuses solemn gentlemen, like myself, are reminding the captive graduates how fortunate they are to have an education, and goading, urging, imploring them to accept the great challenge and remake the future—with faith in democracy, humanity, and God.

I hope I don't sound either irreverent or uncouth if I ask how these abstract powers manifest themselves, how these wonders of recreation are to be wrought. Socrates' answer was brains. And I don't think it has been superseded. But how do you put that idea over to the typical American! For generations he has been indoctrinated with heresies—that you can get something for nothing, that peace and security should be in the bargain basement and are secondary to the business of America which is business, that technology is science, that skill is reason, that a politician is a statesman, and that the best proof of intelligence is meeting a payroll.

That is where you come in. You haven't been indoctrinated yet. And because stupidity is common you don't have to be stupid too. You can use the brains God gave you and that this university has taught you how to use.

—ADLAI E. STEVENSON at Michigan State University (1958)

Today you enter formally and ceremonially into the state of being educated men and women. I should like to speak to you of that state—of its nature, of its privileges, of its duties, and of some of its pains and penalties. But may I first make clear which of the many possible senses of being "an educated man or woman" I intend. I do not intend merely the man or woman who has acquired a certain certified status as the result of pursuing satisfactorily a regimen of study and examination at an institution. Such a person may or may not be an educated person in my sense. Nor do I intend the man or woman who, by whatever means, whether formally or by his own independent efforts, has acquired a certain degree of personal culture and perhaps also a certain professional or scientific or technical competence, *where* such a man or woman regards his attainments *solely* as a means of enriching his personal life or of advancing in his pro-

fession, business or trade, and social sphere. The mark of the educated man, to my mind, is not that, egocentrically, he wholly or even mainly relates the sciences, the technologies, history, philosophy, literature, the arts to himself and his needs; but that, above and before all, he conceives himself, in however modest a way to be their servant. The mark of the educated man, to my mind, is that he recognizes himself to be a member of that historic community of men and women whose dedicated purpose it has been through ages past slowly and painfully to extend the frontiers of human knowledge and, often at great cost to themselves, to defend and preserve the gains made.

—DR. J. F. GOLAY at Roosevelt University (1956)

a. *Which of these extracts seems to you to be the more informal?*
b. *What specific words, phrases, and structures in this extract make it informal?*
c. *Does it contain any formal phrasing or structures? If so, do they disturb the over-all tone? Why are they there?*
d. *In the more formal speech, are there informal words, phrases, or structures? Write them down.*
e. *Write down words, phrases, and structures in this speech which are formal.*

3

A large manufacturing company has a standard practice of sending each of its young engineers at least once a year to a facility other than the one to which he is regularly assigned. He is allowed a month to complete a project of his own devising. After his return, he fills out a standard report form. Here is how one young man answered two successive questions on the form.

What did you accomplish on this assignment?

The effects of the rate of rise of a voltage applied to the Cross-istor have been studied along with an investigation of the capacitance which the device exhibits. It has been found that the capacitance of the device is a function of the applied voltage, thus making the development of a simple equivalent circuit an extremely difficult task. One possible solution to the problem is to define the critical parameters of the device rather than specifying an equivalent circuit as a method of facilitating circuit design involving Cross-istors. The effect of applied voltage, rate of rise of applied volt-

age, operating frequency, temperature, and circuit configuration on these critical parameters is now under investigation.

General comments about the assignment.

I have gotten a great deal of satisfaction out of this assignment because it allowed me to follow up the work I had begun at Loganville. I was also able to make useful comparisons of two different attitudes and approaches to the same problem. Everyone was very helpful, and Dr. Baxter went out of his way to lend me a hand when I ran into trouble.

a. *There is an obvious difference in the tone of these two answers. Was it caused by a difference in the tone of the questions?*
b. *Why did the young man not use the same kind of prose for both? Is there a valid reason why he should not have done so?*
c. *Which of the two answers is the more appropriate in tone? Can the other be rewritten using the same tone? Try your hand at it.*

4

Goodbye Now, or, Pardon My Gauntlet*

Bring down the moon for genteel Janet;
She's too refined for this gross planet.
She wears garments and you wear clothes,
You buy stockings, she purchases hose.
She says That is correct, and you say Yes,
And she disrobes and you undress.
Confronted by a mouse or moose,
You turn green, she turns chartroose.
Her speech is new-minted, freshly quarried;
She has a fore-head, you have a forehead.
Nor snake nor slowworm draweth nigh her;
You go to bed, she doth retire.
To Janet, births are blessed events,
And odors that you smell she scents.
Replete she feels, when food is yummy,

Not in the stomach but the tummy.
If urged some novel step to show,
You say Like this, she says Like so.
And sometimes Janet is Jeanette;
Your napkin is her serviette.
Of refinement she's a fount, or fountess,
And that is why she's now a countess.
She was asking for the little girls' room
And a flunky thought she said the earl's room.

—Ogden Nash

6. Active and Passive

What kind of writing is appropriate to a world moving as fast as the business world today? Obviously there is a need for active, straightforward writing which communicates efficiently and effectively. This kind of writing is not yet universal in industry, but the man who lands on the top in a large company is usually a man who can express his ideas in clear, concise, forceful prose.

Case Study: An Ineffective Letter

Let us look for a moment at two letters—or rather two versions of a single letter written by a staff executive to a plant superintendent. Here is the first version:

> Mr. G. C. Downing
> Plant Superintendent
> Works No. 27
> Forbes, Pennsylvania
>
> SUBJECT: Inspection of Permalast Samples
>
> Dear Sir:
>
> This refers to your letter of October 6, 1957, in which it was proposed that the Sample Department be given responsibility for the inspection of Permalast samples.
>
> It is true that the bulk of the inspection of samples can easily be accomplished by the Sample Department. On the other hand, if

the matter is left entirely in their hands, only giving assistance when a question arises, the results are not likely to be altogether satisfactory. The importance of a sample being right cannot be overestimated. Therefore, it seems desirable that the responsibilities of the Quality Control Section should not be vacated, especially in view of the fact that Permalast is our fastest-selling product.

By the title of the memorandum of October 1, it is indicated that the proposed relaxation of inspection by the Quality Control Section applies only to "Permalast Super" samples, until sufficient personnel are available to the section so that the job can be handled adequately. By maintaining a minimum amount of control of regular Permalast samples by Quality Control, inspection will not be left entirely to the workmen in the department in which the work is performed.

T. J. HELPER
SYNTHETIC FIBER DIVISION

Any businessman will recognize that this letter is written in standard business prose. Its message can be understood: Mr. Downing is being told that his suggestion is not acceptable. Now let's try another version of the same letter:

Mr. G. C. Downing
Plant Superintendent
Works No. 27
Forbes, Pennsylvania

SUBJECT: Inspection of Permalast Samples
Your letter of October 6

Dear Mr. Downing:

Although I understand why you would like to have the Sample Department inspect all Permalast samples, I'm afraid that we cannot afford to bypass Quality Control. Charley Pratt and Tom Evans agree that we must take no chances on the quality of samples of our fastest-selling product.

The division proposes to relax inspection on "Permalast Super" samples only until Quality Control has enough men to tackle the job.

T. J. HELPER
SYNTHETIC FIBER DIVISION

If we examine these two letters, we cannot escape certain conclusions. The second letter, for one thing, does the same job as the first in fewer than

half the words. Furthermore, despite its brevity, it is a more friendly letter and is far more likely to satisfy Mr. Downing. A brief analysis of the first letter will suggest a reason.

The first paragraph is a standard business opening of the type discussed in Chapter 4. It is unnecessary and can be eliminated if the date of the incoming letter is moved up into the "Subject." As it stands, the first paragraph is likely to make Mr. Downing a little bit uneasy, though he may not be clearly aware of the reason for his uneasiness. Helper talks about "your letter of October 6, 1957, in which *it was proposed. . . .*" Presumably Downing himself made the proposal. He has not tried to duck responsibility for it. But the use of "it was proposed," which washes out the person responsible, suggests something vaguely illicit about the whole proposal. The opening of the second paragraph also has a vaguely suspicious look. Instead of coming right out and saying, "The Sample Department can easily inspect the bulk of the samples," Helper worms his way into the sentence: "It is true that the bulk of the inspection of samples can easily be accomplished by the Sample Department." The next sentence requires a second reading for comprehension: "On the other hand, if the matter is left entirely in their hands, only giving assistance when a question arises, the results are not likely to be altogether satisfactory." Who is "giving assistance" to the Sample Department? Only the Sample Department has been mentioned. There is no way for the reader to know until he has read the end of the paragraph, which suggests that the help is to come from Quality Control.

Active and Passive Defined

Before we go through the rest of the letter, let's see why Mr. Helper's letter has a faintly distasteful flavor and why his reader was confused about who was to help in inspecting the samples. Many readers will already have recognized that all three of the sentences discussed are written in the passive voice. The English language has only two voices—active and passive—and the distinction between them is easily made:

Active:	Tom———	filed———	the letter
	(*actor*)	(*action*)	(*acted on*)
Passive:	The letter———	was filed———	by Tom
	(*acted on*)	(*action*)	(*actor*)

Our "normal" way of expressing a thought is active. When we report the results of a meeting to a friend, we do not say, "The roof was raised by the superintendent!" We say, "The superintendent raised the roof!" In speaking we are more likely to say "The Sample Department can inspect the samples" than "The samples can be inspected by the Sample Department."

In each of these examples, it takes more words to make a statement in the passive than it does in the active voice. "Tom filed the letter" is four words; "The letter was filed by Tom" is six. Thus we may conclude that the passive tends to slow down reading. Furthermore, the passive reverses the normal order of ideas and thus requires a subconscious readjustment by the reader, which slows him down even more.

The Proper Use of the Passive

Frequently, of course, an actor does not act *on* anything: "Tom sneezed" or "The saw slipped." There are also situations in which no actor is specified: "The letter was filed" or "The experiment was finished." The writer presumably could tell his reader who filed the letter or who finished the experiment, but there may be no point in his doing so. We often have no immediate interest at all in *who* has done a job. Whenever this is the case, the passive is appropriate. We use it when our interest is primarily in the action performed and the person or thing *receiving* the action. If we wish to describe an experiment in a chemistry text, we are not at all interested either in who first did the experiment or in the student who will repeat it in the laboratory. We are interested rather in the operations involved. So we may use the passive, as do the authors of this textbook description of the equipment for an experiment involving an induction motor:

> The purpose of the experiment is to investigate the effect of a variable rotor resistance upon the starting torque and current. It is advisable to use the same stator as in the preceding experiment. A suitable Prony brake must be provided, preferably of the self-recording type, because the starting torque of a phase-wound rotor varies considerably in its different positions with respect to the stator. It is essential therefore to note several values of the torque with the same setting of the secondary rheostat, moving the rotor by a small angle at a time. A self-recording brake, or "stationary torque recorder," can be improvised out of an ordinary Prony brake, a spring

> balance, and a steam-engine indicator. An ammeter should be provided in each stator phase and in each rotor phase so that the resistances in the three phases can be balanced, unless a special balanced three-phase resistor is available, when readings in one phase are sufficient. Stator watts should be measured, and voltmeters should be provided for the line voltage and that between the slip-rings. If it is necessary to balance the resistances it may be convenient to connect the voltmeter in succession between each of the slip-rings and the neutral point. A reliable indicating tachometer should be connected to the shaft. All the tests specified below are to be performed at the rated stator voltage and supply frequency.*

As these examples indicate, the passive has its uses—and they are not necessarily confined to books. Let us assume that Tom and Helen Smith are walking down the street. Ahead of them they see Bob Swift. Helen watches him for a moment and then comments: "Bob looks depressed." The reason, as Tom knows, is that Bob has lost his job. His answer may be either:

> He was fired yesterday. (*Passive*)

or

> Ted Cooke fired him yesterday. (*Active*)

If his wife knows Ted Cooke as well as she knows Bob Swift, Tom is most likely to use the active—because she will be interested in the actor as well as the action. On the other hand, if Helen does not know Ted Cooke or knows him only very slightly, her husband will probably use the passive—because she is interested in the action, not in the actor. True, Tom could have used a third variant, "He was fired yesterday by Ted Cooke." This sentence does the same job as "Ted Cooke fired him yesterday," but it lacks vigor and directness.

The Improper Use of the Passive

In Mr. Helper's first letter, at least one verb in every sentence is written in the passive voice. The result is an over-all feeling, to use Helper's own words in another connection, of "vacated responsibility." Nobody in particular feels that Quality Control should remain responsible for sample

* B. C. Dennison and V. Karapetoff, *Electrical Laboratory Experiments* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1936), pp. 386–387.

testing; it just *seems desirable.* The last sentence begins, "By maintaining a minimum amount of control of regular Permalast samples by Quality Control." We expect the next words to tell us who will maintain the control. But they do not. Instead we have, "inspection will not be left entirely to the workmen. . . ." Somebody will do the maintaining, but it sounds as if Mr. Helper does not want to say who it will be.

The alternate version of the Helper letter is what we expect to find in the files of a man not afflicted with the passive. He uses an active approach and personal pronouns (*I, you,* and *we*) whenever he would use them in talking to Mr. Downing: "I understood," "you would like," "I'm afraid," and "we cannot"—all in the first sentence. Furthermore, instead of relying on "it seems desirable that the responsibilities of the Quality Control Section should not be vacated," he tells Mr. Downing that Charley Pratt and Tom Evans agree with the decision he is passing along.

The result is a friendly letter. It is also a far shorter letter. When Helper uses an active approach, he finds that he has automatically relieved himself of long, awkward constructions and frequent repetition. He says what he has to say—in a pleasant manner—and then stops.

Case Study: "The Pussyfooter"

The passive, then, tends to wrap everything in a cloak of anonymity. As a result, it sometimes produces effects that the writer does not intend. We have sometimes handed to the members of a group conference this selection from a memorandum written by an executive for the president of his company and asked them to read it once rapidly:

> It is now estimated that the proposed schedule change in production of brass items will affect the shipments to an extent which will make it necessary to cancel the existing plan. Until shipping schedules are brought into line, it is proposed to pay overtime to the crews in the warehouses insofar as it may seem desirable.
>
> There has existed the possibility of a force reduction in some of the warehouses, and it was planned to set forth these reductions for management's consideration. However, it is currently our opinion that no reduction will be required for some time. A detailed investigation will be conducted to test this opinion. It is felt that this investigation can be completed in two months so as to provide time for consideration of reassignments where desired.

When we ask the participants "On the basis of this piece of writing, what do you think of the writer?", we invariably get the same reactions:

> "He's afraid to take responsibility."
>
> "Doesn't know his own mind."
>
> "Pussyfooter."
>
> "Wouldn't trust him to clean out a wastebasket."
>
> "I'd hate to have to *talk* to that guy."

If the members of the group had met him, they would have found him a pleasant, efficient, straight-talking fellow, not at all averse to taking responsibility—in fact, a man in a position of considerable responsibility. His report, however, always gives the members of our business-writing seminars a completely erroneous impression of his personality. Why? He overuses the passive approach to his material, here exemplified by a special and ubiquitous breed of passive—the passive which follows an expletive *it* or *there:* "it is estimated," "it is proposed," "there has existed," "it is planned," "it is now contemplated," "it can be foreseen," and so on. So frequently is this device used that many of its manifestations have become stock business phrases in their own right.

Diluted Verbs

Another subversive tendency has plagued the verb of action and undermined its effectiveness. Over the years businessmen (and other writers) have compiled an extensive collection of verb substitutes which seem to have a glamour not associated with the simple verbs they replace.

The man who sees a thief make off with an automobile will shout to the policeman, "He turned left on Main"; but when he writes a report of the incident he is likely to say, "He made a left turn on Main Street." Instead of saying, "Fasten the assembly to the frame with a No. 3 bolt," he will write "Use a No. 3 bolt to fasten the assembly to the frame" or even "Make use of a No. 3 bolt to fasten the assembly to the frame." In each instance here, the writer substitutes for a vigorous action verb a wordy dilution of it:

make a turn *instead of* turn
use . . . to fasten *instead of* fasten

Other examples of similarly diluted verbs come readily to mind:

WORDY DILUTION	VIGOROUS ACTION VERB
Research resulted in the production of improved surface quality.	Research produced improved surface quality.
This company arrived at its decision to increase its contribution only after it gave careful consideration to other alternatives.	This company decided to increase its contribution only after it carefully considered other alternatives.
At our Paris shop, we experienced a sales drop.	At our Paris shop, sales dropped.
The workman has put the new equipment to use in bending wire.	The workman bends wire with the new equipment.
The Art Department helps in the preparation of these displays.	The Art Department helps to prepare these displays.
It is currently our belief that adjustment of inventories should be accomplished by the Chicago warehouse.	We now believe that the Chicago warehouse should adjust its inventories.

If we isolate the verb forms we can easily see what is happening:

resulted in the production of	produced
arrived at its decision	decided
gave . . . consideration to	considered
experienced a . . . drop	dropped
has put . . . to use in bending	bends
helps in the preparation of	helps to prepare
it is . . . our belief that	we believe

In each instance above, the action verb has been converted into a noun (*production, decision, consideration, drop, bending, preparation, belief*), which is preceded by a colorless and, in context, almost meaningless verb (*resulted, arrived, gave, experienced, put to use, helps, is*). In addition, two or three articles and prepositions are usually required to fill out the phrase.

Generally, dilution of the verb greatly reduces effectiveness in writing. To say "We are instituting a slash in prices" is hardly as vigorous as to say "We are slashing prices." Furthermore, the use of diluted verbs leads naturally to the use of the passive voice and other types of wasteful phras-

ing. As we have already pointed out, the writer who is the slave of one wasteful device is usually the slave of them all. He produces letters that slow the reader down, waste his time, and hamper company business.

The Passive in Scientific and Technical Writing

One of the legitimate uses of the passive voice is to protect the writer from the charge of blowing his own horn. The research scientist, for example, would not write in a medical journal, "After studying carefully the experiments of Von Sichte and Yee, I was able to develop an alternate technique which will cut in half the mortality from this disease." Such a sentence puts the emphasis on "I." It may sound like unabashed chest thumping and carry the unpleasant suggestion that Von Sichte and Yee were really pretty stupid fellows not to see the alternate technique. The scientist, therefore, uses the passive: "The experiments of Von Sichte and Yee were carefully reviewed, and an alternate technique was developed which will reduce mortality from this disease by half." Now the emphasis is on what happened and on the effect of what happened. "I" has been moved behind the scenes, and the sentence now modestly implies that any good man who had sufficient knowledge and skill could have developed the technique. Furthermore, Von Sichte and Yee have been subtly transformed from lesser men whom "I" has outdistanced into distinguished colleagues whose work has made possible a great step forward in medical history. Better than either version is the use of the active without the "I": "a careful review of the experiments of Von Sichte and Yee led to an alternate technique which . . ." Here the virtues of the active voice are combined with the anonymity of the passive. Many sentences in a scientist's report, however, will not lend themselves to this use of the active. They must remain in the passive.

The Passive vs. "I" and "We"

The attempt to avoid a reputation for vanity has in the past led to some curious conventions in business writing, all of which, fortunately,

are on the way out today. Since the use of "I" was the cause of such accusations, the obvious solution was to outlaw "I" completely from business correspondence. Fifty years ago—and still in some quarters today—young men were advised never to use that treacherous word in a business communication, even where the situation made it perfectly obvious that the writer was not being egotistical. "Your letter of the 13th inst. received. It is regretted that the invitation to speak at the Freemont Conference has not been replied to due to its being mislaid. It is a pleasure to accept the kind invitation of the committee to . . ." The effect of this reply is to suggest once again that the writer is trying to sidestep his responsibility. Today the same letter might start "I'm afraid the invitation to speak at the Freemont Conference got buried in my pile of correspondence. Of course, I'll be happy to accept the committee's invitation to . . ."

The prohibition against "I" was also useful for keeping a correspondence clerk from sounding like a vice president. If he received a complaint, he did not say, "I shall take steps to see that this error will not occur again." That, to be sure, is what he would do, but to say it in this way made him sound like a big man in the company. So he stuck to the passive: "Steps will be taken to see that this error does not occur again." And to be safe, the correspondence clerk stuck to the safe passive throughout his life—sometimes even after he became president of the firm. "It is understood that . . ." he would say. Or, "The enclosed is sent to you for your inspection." Or "It is intended to proceed to New Orleans on October 22" for "I'm going to New Orleans on October 22." Or "it seems advisable to" for "I think we should." Or "it is to be presumed that" for "I expect that."

Perhaps we should mention here another method that was evolved to avoid giving the impression of vanity but which has developed into a business cliché. Many who were sensitive to the awkwardness of the passive but determined to avoid the treacherous "I" settled upon the use of "we" as the solution to the problem. This dodge had the additional advantage of spreading responsibility. A junior executive could write to a customer, "We regret to report that we neglected to include the additional quotation on No. 24 Langraf hinges." Presumably the young man made the error himself, but by using the "we" he could hide behind his entire department or his entire company.

But the use of "we" in this way sometimes leads to complications. Let us assume that the same company has just lost a good customer. What is more, the customer has written to the president complaining of the in-

efficiency of the department with which he has been dealing. The president demands a report by the young executive who handled the account. What will be the president's reaction to sentences like these: "We received Mr. Hunt's first letter on May 13, and after careful study we reported . . ." It sounds more than a little bit as though the young man were trying to duck his responsibility by suggesting that the entire department was involved in each decision. And as the "we" is repeated time and again the impression is reinforced.

This confusion in responsibility is further compounded by the common business practice of using "we" to refer to "the company" or "the department." What happens when the same young man writes a memo to the head of his department about his vacation? "If we take our two-week vacation in the middle of June, it will not conflict with other vacations in the department. Furthermore, since John Drew will be available as a substitute, it will not materially affect our ability to complete the experiments assigned to the department during those two weeks." Notice that in the first sentence the writer makes a clear distinction between "we" (the writer) and "the department." When the reader strikes "our ability" in the second sentence, therefore, he tends to assume that it still refers to the writer. It is not until he has completed the sentence that he realizes that this time "our" refers to the department. He then has to go back and re-sort the facts in the sentence. If the confusion between "we" the writer and "we" the department continues (with the probable addition of "we" the company), the reader will soon become understandably irritated by his difficulties in wading through the letter.

A most impressive illustration of the traps into which an overreliance on "we" can lead the writer came from the correspondence of a business executive who flew from New York to California to discuss certain matters with the manager of one of his company's subsidiaries. His wife and one of his business associates accompanied him. On his return he dictated this letter to his secretary:

> **Dear Jack:**
>
> **Thank you very much for giving us so much of your time on Wednesday. Your reasons for wishing to delay production of the larger valves have been reported to top management here, and you may be sure they will be given a sympathetic hearing.**
>
> **Tom Stewart and the writer are very grateful to you for the opportunity to go through your plant, and we are especially appre-**

ciative of the many courtesies which you and Mrs. Smith extended to our wife.*

Sincerely yours,

ROBERT S. THOMPSON

In this letter Mr. Thompson makes use of still another method of avoiding "I." He speaks of himself as "the writer." He no doubt also refers to himself from time to time as "the undersigned" and perhaps even as "your correspondent." Whichever of these substitutes he uses, he succeeds only in making his correspondence more stilted and more difficult to read. When he also uses "we" to refer to himself, he adds to the confusion:

> If you could assist me in this endeavor of mine, the writer would be most pleased to send further details on my investigation so that you may be better aware of my needs. It will be most gratifying if you will provide the writer with your counsel and guidance, and we shall be grateful for any materials which you can send.

Only a writer who is deaf to the sound of his own prose would refer to himself, as this one did, in just two sentences as "I," "the writer," and "we." Many writers will use two such references in a single paragraph.

These problems do not exist only in American business correspondence. F. L. Lucas, an Englishman, has this to say about the same problem as it relates to literary criticism:

> I am sometimes asked by pupils, "What shall we do about expressing personal opinions? Should one say 'I'?" I do not see what else to say. "We" sounds like an old-fashioned leader-writer. "One" is often clumsy, and "one's" still clumsier. "The present writer" is pompous; nor was I much drawn to a facetious variation I was once offered—"the present scribe."
>
> "I" seems the only frank and honest form; it will not make a writer seem egotistic, unless his general tone is that. Actually it is far more modest (and often more truthful) to say "I cannot admire this poem" than to say "This poem is worthless," with the assurance of a president of the Immortals conducting the Last Judgment.†

* For some reason wives seem to cause many problems in business correspondence. One letter writer wished to indicate that husbands and wives of delegates to a convention were invited to a reception. He wrote, "If your spouse should be in New York at that time, that person, of course, is also cordially invited." A little advance planning would have produced a more natural sentence.

† From *Style* (London: Cassell and Company; and New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955), p. 122.

The trend today is toward informality and directness in business correspondence; the use of "I" is no longer—if it ever was—taboo. To communicate effectively the writer must keep the persons about whom he is writing clearly identified so that when he uses "we" the reader will know that he does not mean "I." When an individual recognizes these facts, he will work toward a direct, vigorous style of his own.

Illustrative Materials

1

Read carefully these brief letters from two of the great leaders of the Civil War.

November 21, 1864

Dear Madam:

I have been shown in the files of the War Department a statement of the Adjutant General of Massachusetts that you are the mother of five sons who have died gloriously on the field of battle. I feel how weak and fruitless must be any word of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain from tendering you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the republic they died to save. I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom.

Yours very sincerely and respectfully,

A. LINCOLN

Headquarters Army of Northern Virginia
April 10, 1865

After four years of arduous service marked by unsurpassed courage and fortitude, the Army of Northern Virginia has been compelled to yield to overwhelming numbers and resources.

I need not tell the survivors of so many hard-fought battles who have remained steadfast to the last that I have consented to this result from no distrust of them; but feeling that valor and devotion could accomplish nothing that would compensate for the loss that must have attended the continuance of the contest, I determined to avoid the useless sacrifice of those whose past services have endeared them to their countrymen. By the terms of the agreement, officers and men can return to their homes and remain until exchanged.

You may take with you the satisfaction that proceeds from the consciousness of duty faithfully performed, and I earnestly pray that a merciful God will extend to you His blessing and protection.

With an unceasing admiration of your constancy and devotion to your country, and a grateful remembrance of your kind and generous consideration of myself, I bid you all an affectionate farewell.

R. E. LEE, GENERAL

a. *When do Lincoln and Lee use the passive? Are there valid reasons for their doing so? What are they?*
b. *What is the effect of Lincoln's and Lee's use of "I"? Could "we" be appropriately substituted at any point?*
c. *Are the diction and the phrasing in these letters old-fashioned? Are they wasteful? Are they appropriate to the function of the communication?*

2

*Study carefully the use of the passive and the use of "I" and "we" in the following passage from an address by Winston Churchill to the House of Commons on May 13, 1940.**

In this crisis I think I may be pardoned if I do not address the House at any length today, and I hope that any of my friends and colleagues or former colleagues who are affected by the political reconstruction will make all allowances for any lack of ceremony with which it has been necessary to act. I say to the House as I said to Ministers who have joined this government, I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat.

We have before us an ordeal of the most grievous kind. We have

* From *Blood, Sweat, and Tears* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1941), p. 276. Copyright, 1941, by Winston S. Churchill.

before us many, many months of struggle and suffering. You ask, what is our policy? I say it is to wage war by land, sea, and air. War with all our might and with all the strength God has given us, and to wage war against a monstrous tyranny never surpassed in the dark and lamentable catalogue of human crime. That is our policy. You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word. It is victory. Victory at all costs—victory in spite of all terrors—victory, however long and hard the road may be, for without victory there is no survival. Let that be realized. No survival for the British Empire, no survival for all that the British Empire has stood for, no survival for the urge, the impulse of the ages, that mankind shall move forward toward his goal. I take up my task in buoyancy and hope. I feel sure that our cause will not be suffered to fail among men. I feel entitled at this juncture, at this time, to claim the aid of all and to say, "Come then, let us go forward together with our united strength."

a. *Are there any valid principles underlying Churchill's use of the active and the passive?*
b. *Are there any principles underlying his use of "we," "you," "the House"?*

3

In these two selections of technical writing, both active and passive constructions are used.

It was suggested by Tammann in 1922 that the different rates of oxidation exhibited by iron crystals of different orientations can best be explained by a fixed orientation relationship between the lattice of the iron crystal and the lattice of the oxide film. During the succeeding years, fixed orientation relationships have been demonstrated for reaction products of many kinds, such as recrystallization structures, products of transformation in the solid state, Widmanstätten figures and others; in view of the general occurrence of such orientation relationships, it now seems more than likely that oxide (and other) reaction films grown on metal crystals will upon analysis also be found to exhibit fixed orientation relationships. Indeed the results of Finch and Quarrell, published during the course of our work, seem to prove that films of zinc oxide on zinc, and magnesium oxide on magnesium possess such a relationship, though the analysis does not seem to be complete. We have been successful in demonstrating a fixed orienta-

tion relationship for wüstite ("FeO") films grown on iron, and for cuprous oxide films grown on copper. . . .

In another experiment, cuprous oxide was grown on a single crystal of copper by oxidation in air. This film is almost entirely cuprous oxide, for only an extremely thin film of cupric oxide is formed. Simultaneous determinations of the orientation of the underlying copper crystal and the cuprous oxide film showed that the cube axes in both crystals lay accurately parallel. The copper atoms in cuprous oxide form a face-centered cubic lattice, and the oxygen atoms form an interpenetrating body-centered cubic lattice; the side of the unit face-centered cubic lattice of copper atoms in cuprous oxide is 4.26A., whereas that in pure copper is 3.61A. In this case, therefore, the oxide film is formed merely by an expansion of the copper lattice without change in orientation. Thus only one orientation of cuprous oxide will form on a single crystal of copper. The orientation relationship described is the more nearly perfect the thinner the film; as the film becomes thicker the perfection in orientation is progressively lost, owing largely, no doubt, to distortion effects coming from the large difference in volume. At a thickness of 0.002 in., little evidence of preferred orientation remains. Even in the thinnest films there is evidence of lattice distortion, coming probably from the necessity for adaptation in lattice dimensions at the interface, similar to that found by Finch and Quarrell for metallic films deposited on platinum.

How useful these orientation relationships might be in explaining the differences in rates of oxidation on different crystal faces is at the moment quite uncertain. Work now current in our laboratory may, however, lead to definite issue on this point.*

The atoms at the top of the chromosphere rest on the weakened light which has passed through the screen below; the full sunlight would blow them away. Milne has deduced a consequence which may perhaps have a practical application in the phenomena of explosion of "new stars" or novae, and in any case is curiously interesting. Owing to the Doppler effect a moving atom absorbs a rather different wave-length from a stationary atom; so that if for any cause an atom moves away from the sun it will support itself on light which is a little to one side of the deepest absorption. This light, being more intense than that which provides a balance, will make the atom recede faster. The atom's own absorption will thus gradually

* R. F. Mehl, E. L. McCandless, and F. N. Rhines, "Orientation of Oxide Films on Metals," *Nature* 134 (December 29, 1934), 1009.

draw clear of the absorption of the screen below. Speaking rather metaphorically, the atom is balanced precariously on the summit of the absorption line and it is liable to topple off into the full sunlight on one side. Apparently the speed of the atom should go on increasing until it has to climb an adjacent absorption line (due perhaps to some other element); if the line is too intense to be surmounted the atom will stick part-way up, the velocity remaining fixed at a particular value. These later inferences may be rather far-fetched, but at any rate the argument indicates that there is likely to be an escape of calcium into outer space.*

a. *Ignoring the forms of the verb* to be, *make a list of all active verbs and another of all passive verbs. Does either active or passive dominate one or more of the paragraphs? If so, is there a legitimate reason why it should do so?*

b. *Is there a significant difference in the over-all effect of each paragraph? Explain.*

c. *Can any passive verbs in these selections be changed to active verbs without violating the intention of the paragraph in which they occur?*

4

In writing this chapter, we have occasionally used the passive voice. Here is a list of passive verbs with the page and line where each will be found. In each instance, consider the reasons which may have led to the use of the passive rather than the usually preferred active.

VERB FORM	PAGE	LINE
can be understood	110	18
is moved up	111	6
has been mentioned	111	22
is . . . made	111	31
is specified	112	15
is written	113	30
is . . . used	115	17
has been converted	116	28
is preceded	116	30
are . . . required	116	32
has been moved	117	16
have been . . . transformed	117	19

* A. S. Eddington, *Stars and Atoms* (London: Oxford University Press, 1929), p. 75.

VERB FORM	PAGE	LINE
are combined	117	24
were advised	118	4
was evolved	118	26
is repeated . . . is reinforced	119	7
is . . . compounded	119	9
could . . . be . . . substituted	122	18
are used	123	20

Materials for Revision

The following items contain examples of certain errors discussed in this chapter. Revising them will reinforce your understanding of the problems involved and your ability to recognize similar mistakes and to avoid making them in your own writing. The items have been arranged in groups, each of which represents a specific type of error.

A

1. A quantity of Pliafilm No. 80 for use as a dampproofing material was also offered by us at that time.
2. As you know, our company has a pipeline contract which will be visited by our executive officers.
3. We have been advised by the Accounting Department that they have no record of our having been reimbursed by Heavy Haulers for these freight bills. The Accounting Department further advises that if Heavy Haulers seem reluctant to pay, it might be advantageous to have them return the freight bills and the Chicago Traffic Department would then take appropriate action.
4. The list of material recently submitted by you as potential items of manufacture for our shop is being thoroughly checked and we will submit further reports on it as they become available.
5. The sticking you observe can be eliminated by making the index scale more taut. This operation can be performed by you.
6. Your interest in our company products is sincerely appreciated and we regret that some sort of arrangement cannot be made.
7. Since you are dealing with very small number of individuals, extreme caution must be taken in weighing each factor to be considered.
8. We have been advised today by Mr. Hart that reserve samples covered by 1718, 1928, 1650, 1654, 1698, and 1701 met specifications 100 percent.
9. In addition, when it is known that you will not be present to write your report, someone in your section should be delegated to perform the task.

10. Our 1947 Brockway tractor has been traded in for a new Mack tractor with three axles.
11. A copy of the pamphlet prepared by the State of Vermont may be obtained from the Payroll Branch if needed.
12. A room has been reserved at the William Webster Hotel for John Jones for arrival on morning of January 4.
13. Test run on samples supplied by you confirmed your observation that cracking was occurring at test temperatures of —10°F.
14. By taking the trouble to notify these regulatory agencies in event of bona-fide troubles, a favorable impression is created since it indicates our desire to cooperate to a maximum degree.
15. If this is not successful, removal with a steam lance might be tried. As a last resort, the material might be carefully heated with torches and scraped from the surface while still in the molten or softened condition. Care should be taken in the heating or the material might catch fire.
16. It is recommended, therefore, that a similar procedure be followed by Sales in 1959 and that a list of suggested Research and Development projects be prepared by them as rapidly as possible.
17. We have received no adverse comments to date. It is understood, however, that some additional classifications and man-hours must be added to the final report.
18. It is certain that this proposal will be approved by management.
19. The assistance we received from Mr. Jones of your department in the preparation of this manual is greatly appreciated.
20. When it is desired that a heavier residue product be produced, the unit will be fed continuously with Miniflow and the desired residue product will be obtained by removal of impurities.
21. We are advised by the Procurement Department that the defective 150-lb PMG valve should be returned.
22. The two calculators purchased from W. W. Stone and Associates have been received at Port Sand and are unacceptable for the following reasons.
23. It is our understanding that the training period for the new salesmen is near completion.
24. On February 9 and 10, 1959, a visit was made by the undersigned to Keokuk, Iowa, to interview three prospective clients. [First sentence of a report]
25. Accordingly, the additional excavation for which reimbursement is requested is revised from 664 cu yds to 688 cu yds at $20.00 per cu yd.
26. It will be appreciated if you would invoice us before the first of the year.
27. At that time it was our plan to keep the land-side apron low enough to clear the adjacent ore bridge.
28. It is to be remembered that the ½″ galvanized-wire-rope cable supplied with the buggy has a breaking strength of approximately 10 tons.

29. This material will be submitted by our Advertising Department for your approval before it is used in any form of publicity.
30. The problem of improving ignition in jet fuel systems is considered very important by the armed services.
31. A lease was entered into with the railroad for the site on which the plant stands.
32. The advisability of filing an appeal to the appropriate state court is being considered by Division Management.
33. There was prepared and delivered to the Jones Realty Company a proposal that the Jones Company pay the cost of installing an air-conditioning system for the Harper Building at a cost not to exceed $2.3 million.
34. The practice of taking and/or requesting extra time for settlement of plastic accounts of the Synthetics Division is being experienced. Industrial accounts and foundry accounts of the Coal Division continue to pay in accordance with the terms of sale.
35. According to my findings the amount and kinds of communication carried on by these men vary over wide ranges. Within the sections the professional men holding managerial positions were found to communicate much more frequently than engineers, and a great deal of this communication was oral. With the engineers, however, much of the required communication was in the form of written matter, such as reports, letters, etc. There was also found a distinct difference with whom those in managerial positions and those holding engineering positions communicated.
36. While in a field the substance becomes excited and light is given off.

B

1. We have gathered together a collection of the finest young men in the field, but they have a tendency to be impractical in their approach to our problems.
2. The Operating Committee held a meeting to take under consideration the action required to effect the cancellation of the contract.
3. We need accurate test scores as a means of identification of potential executives for top management.
4. A representative of the industry made an appearance before the board and gave effective answers to all of the allegations made by Mr. Fink.
5. We have been carrying on discussions with the Construction Division about their method of entering these costs, and it is our expectation that they will fully comply with the provisions of Memorandum SAC-65.
6. It is essential that a clear distinction be made between these two patterns.
7. May we be of assistance to you after you make a precise determination of your needs.
8. This standardization is limited to application to motors of 2000 hp.

9. It is Brown and Wilson's recommendation that each of the motors be returned promptly so that our laboratory may conduct an examination of the defective parts.
10. The aim of this report is to give simple formulas which will enable us to exercise strict control over the quality of all by-products of this process.
11. Both subdivisions are in need of immediate attention since they have experienced sales which in total were $2 million less than those which were forecast.
12. Portions of the three samples have also been given to Dr. Wolff for determination of germination rate.
13. Mr. Johnson is in favor of immediate notice being given to the tenants.
14. We should call all the employees together for an explanation of the new rates.
15. After the lag, our business experienced a return to normal.
16. The control section decided on examination of each of the factors individually.
17. The committee arrived at a conclusion of its affairs with dispatch.
18. It is still our feeling that the new line will evidence a growth.

C

1. Philip Carey Mfg. Company
   1427 Owen Street
   Cincinnati 15, Ohio

   Attention: Mr. E. F. Dittmar

   Gentlemen:
   After talking to you over the phone this morning, I checked our files regarding the special freight equalization on roofing pitch with Ironton, Ohio, on shipments into Cincinnati, Ohio . . .

   * * *

   The writer of this letter will call your office sometime during the week of June 2 to make final arrangements for the arrival of our crew.

   Very truly yours,

   JOHN J. JONES
2. It is planned that we will arrive on September 30.
3. It was agreed by the committee to send the undersigned on the inspection trip he proposed.
4. After retirement in June, there will be no one to fill this position. We plan to leave the company on the last day of the month.
5. We just discovered that when we wrote the order the carbon underneath covered only half of the underlying sheet, so that only three of the four items you asked for appeared on it.

7. Sentence Structure I

In discussions of writing, one occasionally meets an old saw: if a person writes a poor sentence (or paragraph, or letter, or report), it is because he is not sure of what he is trying to say. Like any other half truth, this one can be very irritating. It is often pronounced with great solemnity and just as often received with frustration. The oracle who offers it can cite instances to support it. The annoyed listener, although he may recognize the validity of the saw, recalls situations in which he knew exactly what he wanted to say but did not know how to say it. Most of us have on occasion turned to an associate and said, "Now, what I want to tell him is . . ." or "What we ought to tell him is . . ." and then, "But how do I [or we] say it?"

The old maxim might better read: a poor sentence (or paragraph, or letter, or report) *may* be the result of the writer's not being sure of what he is trying to say. Or better still: if a person is not sure of what he is trying to say, he will probably write poorly. The causality indicated by the original statement is not always correct. Take, for example, the following:

> **Upon receipt of your June 23 invoice covering this transaction we were given only a 30 percent discount rate as I believe we were entitled to enjoy a 35 percent discount due to the fact that I requested on our confirming order to kindly group our order No. V-4817 with another mechanical convection oven, namely Model 43X appearing on our purchase order No. V-4816 of the same date.**

The man who wrote this sentence knew what he meant, as a careful reading will show. The point of this discussion is that many people (particularly

those who pronounce the old saw) do not realize that there are *two* important aspects to writing:

1. Knowing *what* one wants to say, and
2. Knowing *how* to say it.

Weakness in the first almost always leads to ineptness in the second. But the inept statement of an idea does not necessarily indicate failure to understand *what* to say.

The second aspect of writing, knowing *how* to say something, involves several matters. We have already seen in Chapter 2 that one must write with the reader in mind, that one must tailor what he wants to say to the needs of a particular communications problem. The writer should be aware of the patterns of language available: the various structures of sentences and the uses for which each is best suited. Just as a building is designed for a particular location and a particular function, so ideas require particular constructions that will adequately house them and reflect their meaning.

Hooks: Misleading Coordinators

Here is a very simple example of a construction which does not accurately reflect the relationship of the two ideas presented:

> **Thank you for your letter of July 1, and we were pleased to have your Mr. Thompson visit us.**

Why *and?* The hooking together of two distinctly separate ideas results in an odd sentence. The thoughts are contorted by the pattern to which they have been bent. Apparently the letter of July 1 thanked the writer of the sentence for his kindness in showing Mr. Thompson his plant. In his reply, he wants to acknowledge Thompson's letter and state that he was happy to have been able to show Thompson around. He joined the two ideas in one uncomfortable sentence because he was afraid that "Thank you for your letter of July 1" might sound too abrupt or impolite. Even if this opinion were accurate—and we would argue that it is not—he has taken a very awkward way out, for the two ideas clearly belong in separate sentences:

> **Thank you for your letter of July 1. We were pleased to have your Mr. Thompson visit us.**

These sentences say what the writer had in mind, and their simplicity suggests a sincerity completely absent from the distorted original.

A *but,* when used as an unnecessary hook, can distort in the same way:

> **We were careful not to discuss any financial arrangements for obtaining the use of this equipment but it is evident that we would like to do business with them, but we do not know how it can be accomplished.**

This sentence is not merely very awkward: it is also an inaccurate expression of the writer's ideas. The first *but* implies a relationship between the first two clauses which does not in fact exist. It misleads the reader. Perhaps the writer was anticipating the appropriate *but* which comes later.

In support of our earlier contention that one writing fault often brings others with it, we should point out that there are other weaknesses in this sentence. It is longer than it needs to be, it is wordy, and it is stilted. Compare it with the following revision:

> **We were careful not to discuss the cost of using this equipment. We'd like to do business with them, but don't know how to swing it.**

If the memo were going to someone with whom the writer was not on as friendly terms as the tone of the revision above implies, it could be a little more formal:

> **We were careful not to discuss financial arrangements for using this equipment. We would like to do business with them, but we do not know how to accomplish it.**

Although the phrasing here is closer to the original, it is a better statement. Instead of a single long sentence, it contains two shorter ones. Instead of 39 words, it uses only 28. And instead of sounding stilted, it reflects competence.

A hook can distort in still another way:

> **The brushes were moved forward and sales were found to rise.**

The writer of this sentence has flattened it out, so that the causality, which should be indicated, has disappeared. He might better have written:

> **When the brushes were moved forward, sales rose.**

Or:

> **Because the brushes were moved forward, sales rose.**

Hooking two ideas together with an *and*—coordinating them—indicates that they are of equal importance. *And* is a coordinating conjunction. It

functions like a plus sign or the pivot on a balance. When a writer uses it to hook together ideas that do not have an *and* relationship, at best his reader must stop to determine the proper relation between the ideas that have merely been thrown together. At worst, the reader will miss the relationship completely.

Subordination

The following sentence provides an example of a somewhat similar problem:

> **Roger French is our representative in Canada and he has been working with us for the past year on a trial basis.**

The *and* implies that the two clauses are equally important. The sentence appeared, however, in a reply to a letter asking how long Roger French had been with the firm. Clearly, then, the fact that French was the firm's Canadian representative was not as important to the reader as the length of time he had been their representative. If the writer wanted to indicate French's job, he should have put it into a subordinate construction:

> **Roger French, who is our representative in Canada, has been with our company for the past year on a trial basis.**

Or:

> **Roger French, our representative in Canada, has been with our company for the past year on a trial basis.**

If the questioner had been primarily interested in what French's job was, the sentence should have read:

> **Roger French, who has been with our company for the past year on trial, is our representative in Canada.**

Or:

> **Roger French, an employee of our company for the past year on trial, is our representative in Canada.**

In either case the original sentence, by hooking the two ideas together with an *and*, failed to indicate the logical relationship between them.

It is not difficult to determine which is the main portion (*independent*

clause) of a sentence. Simply read aloud each group of words below by itself. Such a reading will reveal the independent clauses, which can stand by themselves:

> The brushes were moved forward
>
> sales were found to rise
>
> Roger French is our representative in Canada
>
> he has been working with us for the past year on a trial basis

These are all independent, or main, clauses. They should be used only for main ideas.

Clarifying or supporting (*subordinate*) ideas should be put into subordinate constructions:

> When the brushes were moved forward
>
> Because the brushes were moved forward
>
> who is our representative in Canada
>
> our representative in Canada
>
> who has been with our company for the past year on trial
>
> with our company for the past year on trial

In writing, subordinate constructions should not stand by themselves except where they are used to simulate speech (when they often appear as answers to questions), as, for example, in advertising copy.

> Why did we make so much money on our plastics this year? Because the new sales-incentive system is better for plastics than for cottons.

They make no sense unless obviously connected with the main idea to which they relate. The best way to indicate the relationship between such ideas is to keep them in the same sentence, using the proper subordinating conjunction and punctuation.

Marathon Sentences

Sometimes a hook does not distort but makes a sentence unnecessarily long:

> The Circuit Court of Appeals has affirmed the lower court's decision in favor of Browning-Carlton and this is almost certainly the end of this litigation, although the plaintiff can still ask for a rehearing before the Circuit Court of Appeals and for a writ of certiorari from the U.S. Supreme Court.

Certainly, leaving out the *and,* putting a period after *Browning-Carlton,* and capitalizing the *T* in *this* would make the passage easier to read.

Here is a variation of the same pattern:

> It has been through the continuing research of Mr. Feldon that the Bailey Tube has been brought to this present stage of development, as a result of which he is considered the outstanding authority on Bailey Tube design and application.

Even stripped of its verbiage, the sentence is awkward:

> The continuing research of Mr. Feldon has brought the Bailey Tube to its present stage of development, as a result of which he is considered the outstanding authority on its design and application.

The *as a result of which,* although attempting to indicate the relation between the two ideas, still functions like a hook. One way of getting rid of it, as we have seen with the *and* hook above, is to indicate the causality between the two ideas more clearly:

> Because the continuing research of Mr. Feldon has brought the Bailey Tube to its present stage of development, he is considered the outstanding authority on its design and application.

In the recast sentence, the first part has been thrown into a subordinating construction. The writer of the original sentence may not have intended this interpretation. Indeed, as he wrote it, the first part of his sentence can stand alone:

> It has been through the continuing research of Mr. Feldon that the Bailey Tube has been brought to its present stage of development.

By starting with *because* we turn the first part from an independent into a supporting statement. In the context of the report from which it came, the fact about Mr. Feldon's research and the fact about his being the authority should have been equally important. In this particular instance, we need a word that will imply coordination but still indicate causality, something that will do what the writer hoped *as a result of which* would do. English has such a word—*therefore:*

> The continuing research of Mr. Feldon has brought the Bailey Tube to its present stage of development. Therefore he is considered (*or* He is therefore considered) the outstanding authority on its design and application.

We have, then, a connective which functions as a coordinator but indicates a relationship which a coordinator does not.

Appropriate Coordination

There is another sentence pattern of which writers should be aware, because they often misuse it and because they often fail to use it when they should. Let's return to our hooks, coordinators used to hook together a pair of ideas that should not really stand together in a simple coordinate relationship. Here is an example of still another kind of distortion:

> On July 9 we received 30 complete units, and we also received 60 extra units which I believe may have been packed with this shipment in error.

In this sentence changing one hook for another would improve it:

> . . . we received 30 complete units, *but* we also received 60 extra units . . .

This revision still does not indicate adequately the proper relationship between the ideas. They are equal in importance, but the relationship between them is still not expressed exactly. Here is what the writer meant:

> On July 9 we received *not only* the 30 complete units we ordered, *but also* 60 extra units, which must have been packed with the shipment by mistake.

Laying the sentence out in outline form will show the function of the four italicized words:

> On July 9 we received
> *not only* the 30 complete units . . .
> *but also* 60 extra units . . .

The emphasis here is on the equal and parallel importance of the two ideas introduced by the pair of coordinators.

Connectives and How to Use Them

Grammarians have identified four types of connectives: coordinating conjunctions, subordinating conjunctions, conjunctive adverbs, and correlative conjunctions. The simplest are the *coordinating conjunctions:*

and	for	nor
but	or	yet

They connect ideas or parts of a sentence that are of equal weight or importance:

> The crude solid was treated with nitrosylsulfuric acid *and* then with potassium iodide, *and* the product was again submitted to hydrogenolysis over Raney nickel.
> The pin is continually being immersed in water, *but* it never rusts.
> Mr. Farren can not collect the money due him in time, *nor* can he obtain a loan.

The second most common group of conjunctives are the *subordinating conjunctions.* Here are some of those most frequently used; there are many more:

after	inasmuch as	when
although	in order that	whenever
as	since	where
as if	so that	wherever
as long as	that	whether
as soon as	though	which
because	unless	while
before	until	who
how	what	why
if		

They connect the subordinate idea of the sentence to the main idea (the subordinate clause to the independent clause) in such a way as to indicate the exact relationship between the two:

> *When* subjected to high-vacuum sublimation, this form yielded another.
> We would appreciate your checking your inventory *before* you file your claim.
> He must remain in Denver *until* the tests are completed.

The third group, although very useful, are not employed as frequently

as they should be. They are called *conjunctive adverbs*. Here are some of the most common ones:

accordingly	hence	nevertheless
anyhow (colloquial)	however	so
anyway (colloquial)	indeed	still
besides	likewise	then
consequently	moreover	therefore
furthermore	namely	

Mr. Smither warned me that I may be wasting my time. I will go *nevertheless*.
This product has continually lost money for us; *consequently*, I feel that we should discontinue it.
The rig may wind up a total loss. I think, *however*, that we should risk it.

Unlike coordinating and subordinating conjunctions, conjunctive adverbs do not always begin the clauses they serve. A little study of these words and some conscious practice in using them will well repay a letter or report writer. They often indicate a relationship that other forms can not.

The fourth group of conjunctions are the *correlative conjunctions:*

both . . . and	not only . . . but also
either . . . or	not so . . . as
neither . . . nor	whether . . . or

By using these pairs of coordinators to introduce groups of words that are parallel in structure, a writer can point out to the reader that the ideas presented (1) are of equal importance and (2) stand in a particular kind of coordinate relationship.

Our discussion thus far has emphasized that a sentence pattern, the architecture of a sentence, should reflect the meaning of the ideas in that sentence. Placing important ideas in main clauses and lesser ideas in subordinate clauses maintains the clarity of the relationship of ideas. Hooking together ideas which do not stand in coordinate relationship to one another, or simply listing them, flattens out the proper relationships and reduces the piece of writing to a series of ideas strung together like sausages:

The Tennessee Coal Mines are using this "Easy Breather" in their "low-coal" mines in Parkersburg. These mines employ about 500 persons. They are considering it in other mines, and they state that the subject is controversial among mining people. They feel that

the equipment is likely to have value in the event of mine fires, and this is particularly so in mines where belt conveyors are used. The equipment is located at various points in the mine. A sufficient number are kept in the mine to supply each man on the turn.

Certainly this juvenile-sounding writing has nothing to recommend it. It projects a picture of the person who wrote it which is not complimentary. (The writer was in other ways a man of at least average competence.) If the reader has the time and patience, he may reconstruct from such a string what the writer had in mind. He will not thank the writer, however, for making him do so.

Illustrative Materials

1

Word order in English was not always as important as it is now. In King Alfred's time (A.D. *849–901*), *as Fries has pointed out, the sentence* The man struck the bear *could have been written*:*

Se mann þone beran sloh.
þone beran se mann sloh.
þone beran sloh se mann.
Sloh se mann þone beran.

This randomness of word order was possible only because each word in Anglo-Saxon had an ending which indicated its relationship to the rest of the words in the sentence.

Today, because our language has lost most of these case endings, the English sentence has a relatively fixed word order: subject—verb—object. Many people are not aware of the finer points of word order. Examine any prose passage:

a. *What are the normal positions of a noun and its modifier* (*or modifiers*)*?*

b. *Are there any exceptions to this rule?*

c. *What are the normal positions of a verb and its modifier* (*or modifiers*)*?*

* Charles Carpenter Fries, *American English Grammar* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1940), p. 251. This is an excellent work for anyone who is interested in the way we use language.

d. *Are there any exceptions to this rule?*
e. *How many ways does English have of indicating possession?*

2

Examine this passage:

The diggle woggles the sug. Then it fraggles a sig. When it lings, it fings. The sig's libid crimples. The sigs crimple too.

a. *In the first sentence, which word is the subject? The verb? The object? How do you know?*
b. *To what word in the first sentence does* it *in the second sentence refer.* It *in the third sentence? How do you know?*
c. *What is the relationship between the words* sig's *and* libid *in the fourth sentence? How do you know?*
d. *What is the difference between* sig's *in the fourth sentence and* sigs *in the fifth sentence? What gives you the clue?*
e. *Do you have to know the meaning of words in a sentence to understand their relationships? Explain your answer.*

3

One subordinating conjunction frequently gives writers a good deal of trouble. Read the following sentences:

Preponderant thought continues the correction will neither be long nor severe.

The feeling is mounting trends in a number of directions must be viewed for their impact on the over-all picture.

More important, if our premise we are in a bull market is correct, then one should not be overly concerned with intermediate movements.

a. *How far did you get in each sentence before you realized that something was wrong?*
b. *What is missing in each sentence and where does it belong?*
c. *Separate the main portion of each sentence (the independent clause) from the group of words which the missing word should have introduced. Does this procedure help to determine the meaning?*
d. *What function, then, does the missing word perform?*
e. *When can it be left out without confusing the reader?*

f. *In the second sentence, does it make any difference if the missing word is put in before or after* mounting?

4

Now read these sentences:

Many people feel that if an article is advertised nationally that it is a good product to buy.

I was told that if I could supply the necessary benzine by July 3 that I could have the order.

a. *How does the problem in these sentences differ from the problem in the above list?*
b. *Separate the main portion of each sentence (the independent clause) from the rest of the sentence and examine the words that remain. What does this procedure demonstrate?*

5

Here is a further problem with the same word:

Jones should rerun the tests and try the new fuel. He can schedule Block *C* for the tests. That should be done by next Tuesday.

R. C. Donald became president and F. L. Grinnel was moved up to replace him. That means trouble for us.

a. *What causes the confusion in these sentences?*
b. *How can the confusion be avoided?*

Materials for Revision

The following items contain examples of certain errors discussed in this chapter. Revising them will reinforce your understanding of the problems involved and your ability to recognize similar mistakes and to avoid making them in your own writing.

1. The recent realignment of the Division has placed the Project Department and the Technical Department within the Development Department, and

I understand that, in conformity with company organization terminology, these departments will in the future be considered as sections.

2. I have referred this case to our Insurance Section, and you will hear from us again in the very near future. [Closing sentence]
3. Will you please let me know when this sample has gone forward, and we will report to you on the results of our tests after they have been completed. [Closing sentence]
4. On July 13, it appeared that we would have difficulty moving some of our Buffalo stock and desired at that time, and still desire, to go into the winter at Buffalo with a minimum inventory.
5. We will, however, as indicated during our conversation today, endeavor to have this work completed so that I can give you the final figure by phone on Thursday, March 3, so that you can enter this on your books for the month of February.
6. It goes without saying, of course, that the sealed shaft precludes negotiating a curve, and we hope these comments are of value to you.
7. We have asked Eastern Refining Company to reserve their next car for your account, assuming you will need another one during the second half of October so will appreciate your giving us the next estimated shipping date at your earliest convenience so we will know whether or not to continue to hold this car for you.
8. We want to call your attention to the compartment forward of the engine room which you showed as extending completely across the hull, whereas this compartment is only in the center portion of the hull and it extends forward of the oil-tank section.
9. Your April bill remains unpaid, as a result of which you now are five months behind and we shall have to ask you to send us remittance in full by November 1.
10. We continued to improve and supervise the machine at Atlas and have recently appointed an independent committee to analyze and audit the past records and operation at Atlas and prepare a report recommending the future course to be taken in this field.
11. In both cases a motion to limit the scope of the testimony was made and was granted in the second case when the motion was timely, but denied in the first case when the motion was late.
12. Sales to the railroads continued to be less than anticipated and was caused by the railroads' low maintenance activities.
13. With respect to the second, with the increase of foreign exchange, QAR has been able to become current in its foreign obligations, with the exception of John-Ramey, to which, however, payments in excess of $200 thousand were made during the last half of 1955 and QAR has now liquidated all arrearages owing to John-Ramey prior to 1955.
14. We were careful not to discuss any financial arrangement for obtaining the use of this equipment but it is evident that we would like to do business with

them, but we do not know how it can be accomplished.

15. As you will note from the letter, the talk should last about one hour and the date is October 15, 1959.
16. The report I mentioned is not yet finished. I am waiting for some estimates from Barbara Hoffmann but a copy will be on its way to you as soon as it is off the press.
17. It was agreed that they would advise us of any change in their plans to wait approximately ten days for the writer to set up a second meeting at which time a discussion would take place to arrive at a method of using this equipment.
18. The plant neglected to pass this information on to me so, therefore, I had no way of knowing about it.
19. We wish to thank you for the opportunity to submit this proposal and if there is any additional information we can give you, please advise us.
20. During this time we learn about the organization and types of businesses that we are in. Also we got to see and talk to some of the management people.
21. The general procedure was to show slides or movies about the products or in many instances the actual products themselves were brought along.

8. Sentence Structure II

The Basic Patterns of English

Before we continue our study of sentence-structure problems, let us review the major sentence patterns:

The Basic Pattern: The Simple Sentence

Iron rusts.

Negligent drivers kill pedestrians.

Wee Willies are not tugboats.

Rockets are powerful.

A Simple Joining Pattern: The Compound Sentence

Iron rusts, and gates sag.

Negligent drivers kill pedestrians, but negligent pedestrians kill drivers.

Wee Willies are not tugboats, nor can they serve in their stead.

A Pattern to Show Dependent Relationships: The Complex Sentence

Advertising must reach the man who spends the money.

When this compound reacted with nitrobenzene in the presence of sodium carbonate, a mixture was formed in which at least two isometric-*m*-terphenyls were present.

More Complicated Patterns of Coordination: Balanced and Parallel Constructions

A qualitative test showed the presence of iodine in IV; therefore V must have been the product of an unusual Ullmann reaction.

We not only increased our production, but we also increased our profit per unit produced.

A Variation on the Basic Pattern: Passive and Similar Constructions

The crude solid product was treated with nitrosylsulfuric acid.

It is necessary to begin at once.

There are eight different samples.

The Basic Pattern Inverted: Questions

Is there a public-relations man at the plant?

How can we improve sales?

With whom did he arrive?

They can take the plane with us, can't they?

The Basic Pattern Truncated: Requests

Please send us your answer by return mail.

Let's stop this inefficiency at once.

Add two carloads of pitch.

Be as careful as you can with the open flame.

These examples have been shorn of modifiers so that the patterns will be obvious. We do not want to suggest that such relatively uncomplicated sentences will do for all letters and reports. Moreover, we have listed only the more important patterns.

Parallel Structure

The problem of parallel structure raised by correlative conjunctions, discussed at the end of the last chapter, appears at other times. Take, for example, the following sentence:

> **Unusual maintenance expenses of $700 to replace the tires on a lift truck and equip it with LPG fuel, restocking the machine shop with valves, fittings, etc., amounted to $400, cleaning the septic tank cost $150, and slag for the yard totaled $300, increased this category total by $1,550.**

About half way through it, a reader usually discovers that he is lost. Actually, he has been misled. Breaking the sentence up into its components will help to show what happened:

> **Unusual maintenance expenses . . . increased this category total by $1,550**
> **of**
> **$700 to replace the tires on a lift truck and equip it with LPG fuel, restocking the machine shop with valves, fittings, etc., amounted to $400, cleaning the septic tank cost $150,**
> **and**
> **slag for the yard totaled $300.**

There are many things wrong with this sentence. First, placing 40 words between the subject and the verb of the main clause makes the sentence almost impossible to follow. Second, the *of,* intended to introduce the series of expenses which follows, actually misleads. Third, three of the terms in the series employ three different methods of indicating the same thing—*amounted to, cost,* and *totaled;* and the other term (the first of the series) uses a different approach altogether.

But the most important difficulty is that after establishing a pattern in the first phrase, the writer reverses the pattern without warning. He begins the first phrase with the figure of $700, but in the next phrase he moves the figure indicating cost to the end ($400). He disregards the grammatical parallelism necessary to indicate the relationship between the four terms in the series, all of which are equal in importance, parallel in meaning, and parts of a larger total. By maintaining the grammatical parallelism necessary to express the parallelism of the ideas, he would have avoided all the other difficulties as well. Here is a simple solution in tabular form:

Unusual maintenance expenses:	
Replacing tires on lift truck and equipping with LPG fuel	$ 700
Restocking machine shop with valves, fittings, etc.	400
Cleaning septic tank	150
Buying slag for yard	300
Increase in Total	$1,550

In the process of ordering the components of the series, we began each with the same form of the relevant word: replac*ing*, equipp*ing*, restock*ing*, clean*ing*, and buy*ing*. Entering each phrase in the same way, the reader moves comfortably from one to the next without having to pause to adjust or to figure out where he is. A rewritten version of this material, with strengthened punctuation where necessary, might read:

> Unusual maintenance expenses—replacing tires on lift truck and equipping with LPG fuel, $700; restocking machine shop with valves, fittings, etc., $400; cleaning septic tank, $150; and buying slag for the yard, $300—increased the total of this category by $1,550.

This sentence may not represent the ideal solution to the writer's problems. (We shall have more to say about the sentence in Chapter 9.) But here, at least, there is no problem in comprehension, for the relationship of parts in the sentence is clear.

Parallelism is often important not only for the elements of a sentence but also for larger grammatical units. Note how difficult it is to follow these instructions:

> General Specifications. Outlined below are summaries of the specifications covering the shop or yard application of materials recommended for each use in "III":
>
> *Use No. 1—Well-column Piping*
>
> A. Interior
> 1. Clean by sandblasting.
> 2. One coat of "Primer X7."
> 3. Minimum 1/16 inch thickness of "Top Gloss," penetration 10 to 15.
> 4. Holiday-detect and touch-up.
>
> B. Exterior
> 1. Clean by sandblasting.
> 2. One coat of "Primer X7."
> 3. Minimum 1/16 inch "Top Gloss," penetration 10 to 15.
> 4. Holiday-detect and touch-up.
> 5. Cut back six inches from ends.
> 6. Prime bare ends with one coat of "Primer X7."
> 7. One coat of whitewash to enameled surfaces.

The trouble, of course, is that the reader has to approach each item very tentatively, until he determines its pattern.

The writer could have made it much easier for the reader if he had begun each item in the same way:

A. Interior
   1. Clean . . .
   2. Apply one coat . . .
   3. Apply a minimum thickness . . .
   4. Holiday-detect and touch up . . .
B. Exterior
   1. Clean . . .
   2. Apply one coat . . .
   3. Apply a minimum thickness . . .
   4. Holiday-detect and touch up . . .
   5. Cut back . . .
   6. Prime . . .
   7. Apply one coat . . .

In the revised version the reader can move from one item to the next without hesitation. The parallelism of grammatical construction indicates the functional parallelism of the items in the instructions.

Dangling Phrases and Clauses

Faulty sentence structure can mislead the reader in other ways. In the following sentence, who is doing the confirming?

> **Confirming our recent discussion with Mr. Brown, Mr. Jones has requested that a study be made to determine the investment required.**

Mr. Jones? It would seem so. Actually, the writer meant to indicate that *he* was confirming his recent discussion with Mr. Brown. Another example will show more clearly what the trouble is:

> **Driving around the mountain, a bear came into view.**

Unless we are faced by a trained bear, someone else was doing the driving. This bear was probably not in the car at all, but outside. The problem is obviously grammatical. The reader expects that the *ing* phrase (a participle) at the beginning of the sentence belongs with the subject, *the bear*. The same difficulty caused the confusion in the earlier sentence: because Jones is the subject of the main clause, the reader expects Jones to be the person doing the confirming. These phrases are supposed to modify the subject, but in fact they do not modify any word in the sentence. Thus they are called *dangling* phrases.

There are two ways of solving this problem. First, the writer can make sure that the modifying phrase actually qualifies the subject of the sentence:

> Confirming my recent discussion with Mr. Brown, I would like to report that Mr. Jones has requested . . .
> Driving around the mountain, we suddenly saw a bear come into view.

The other solution is to change the participle form to a verb and provide it with its own subject:

> I'd like to confirm my recent discussion with Mr. Brown. Mr. Jones has requested . . .
> As we drove around the mountain, a bear came into view.

The revisions avoid possible misunderstanding or amusing misstatement.

Other modifying phrases, too, can be improperly related to the main clause of the sentence:

> To confirm my recent discussion with Mr. Brown, Mr. Jones has requested . . .
> At the peak, we sold. (When the stock reached its peak, we sold.)
> Struck by the falling beam, an ambulance took him to the hospital. (After he was struck by the falling beam, an ambulance . . .; *or* Struck by the falling beam, he was taken to the hospital . . .)

These misrelated or dangling modifiers can be avoided in the same way as dangling participles.

Pronouns and Antecedents

Improperly related pronouns can also cause difficulties. In the following sentence which contains a dangling participle, pronouns are also confused.

> Confirming our telephone conversation of this morning, we have received word from Grimes Foundry that they will ship the material by January 18.

The *our* refers to the reader and the writer. The *we* refers to the writer's company. A less confusing version would be:

> Confirming my telephone conversation with you of this morning, I'd like to repeat that we have received . . .

The revision requires more words, but it eliminates any chance of confusion. The fuzzy overlapping of *our* and *we* in the original probably results from an attempt to avoid using *I* or *my*, a matter discussed in Chapter 5.

Another confusion involving pronouns arises from the use of collective nouns, nouns which may be thought of as either singular or plural: *company, department, senate, team, group,* and so forth. If the writer thinks of "the company" as a unit, he will use the singular pronoun to refer to it. However, if he thinks of "the company" as a group of individuals, he will use "they." Too often the businessman produces a sentence like this one:

> Not knowing how closely the customer orders to his requirements, we should supply them with a little more than they asked for.

A writer may treat the word *customer* as either singular or plural, but he must be consistent if he is to avoid confusion:

> . . . the customer . . . *his* requirements, we should supply *him* . . . more than *he* asked for.
>
> . . . the customer . . . *their* requirements, we should supply *them* . . . more than *they* asked for.

That way there can be no mistake. With words like *each, anyone, everybody,* and *everyone,* formal usage requires the following pronoun to be singular:

> Everyone should do *his* best.

Sometimes a writer confuses his reader by not making his pronoun reference clear:

> Mr. Frank reports that reserve samples from batches 105, 106, and 107 met specifications exactly. *It* is also in the Air Force Specifications.
>
> This equipment has great merit, not only in our contract organization, but also as an aid to promoting paint sales. If *this* were considered possible, it would be necessary to bring in other members of the company to discuss the most practical way to offer this equipment to our customers.

To what do the *it* in the first example and the *this* in the second refer? Pronouns should refer to a specific word or phrase. If they merely point in a general direction, they cause uncertainty.

The final problem involves not the misuse of pronouns but the failure to use them.

> Attached are Invoices Nos. 573/62 and 573/63. These invoices cover . . .

Why not "*They* cover . . ."? Proper use of pronouns can help the reader to avoid much awkward repetition.

Piled-up Modifiers

The overuse of modifiers is another awkward type of sentence blunder that appears occasionally in letters and memos but is more typically found in engineering and scientific reports. Here is a sentence from an interoffice memorandum:

> **This procedure is needed to implement the adoption of a *recently designed multicopy snap-out-style form* designed to simplify paper work.**

When a reader finds himself entangled in such a massive aggregation, he reacts as if he were lost in a swamp: he slows down, feels as if the mire will swallow him up, fails to distinguish the details of his surroundings. The unwieldy phrase can be broken up:

> **This procedure is necessary if we are to adopt the multicopy snap-out form which was recently designed to simplify paperwork.**

Here is an example from a technical report:

> **The *60-ampere unused disconnect fused switch* is convenient.**

After the third or fourth word in such a string, the reader has to put out his hand to feel his way.

Variety in Sentence Structure

Understanding when and how to use various constructions will help writers to avoid another difficulty which plagues written business communications: monotony. Let's take another look at a monotonous passage quoted in the preceding chapter.

> **The Tennessee Coal Mines are using this "Easy Breather" in their "low coal" mines in Parkersburg. These mines employ about 500 persons. They are considering it in other mines, and they state that the subject is controversial among mining people. They feel that the equipment is likely to have value in the event of mine fires,**

> **and this is particularly so in mines where belt conveyors are used. The equipment is located at various points in the mine. A sufficient number are kept in the mine to supply each man on the turn.**

We do not mean to suggest that business writing reaches this degree of monotony very often. The passage serves, however, as a dramatic example. If the writer had used grammatical constructions appropriate to his ideas, the monotony would have disappeared automatically:

> **The Tennessee Coal Mines are using this "Easy Breather" in their "low coal" mines in Parkersburg, which employ about 500 people. Although the company management admit that the equipment is controversial among mining people, they are considering it for their other mines since they feel that it is likely to be useful in mine fires, particularly in mines that use belt conveyors. They keep enough "Easy Breathers" strategically located at various points in the mine to supply each man on the turn.**

The revision speaks for itself.

Monotony should be avoided for several reasons. First, it distorts and flattens out the proper relationships between ideas. Second, it can discourage the reader from giving sufficient attention to a piece of writing. And third, it reflects on the writer's ability. One report like the original version of the "Easy Breather" paragraph can very well lose an important customer or endanger the writer's career.

Illustrative Materials

1

Here is the opening paragraph of Chapter 7.

In discussions of writing, one occasionally meets an old saw: if a person writes a poor sentence (or paragraph, or letter, or report), it is because he is not sure of what he is trying to say. Like any other half truth, this one can be very irritating. It is often pronounced with great solemnity and just as often received with frustration. The oracle who offers it can cite instances to support it. The annoyed listener, although he may recognize the validity of the saw, recalls situations in which he knew exactly what he wanted to say but did not know how to say it. Most of us have on occasion turned to an associate and said, "Now, what I want to tell him

is . . ." or "What we ought to tell him is . . ." and then, "But how do I [or we] say it?"

a. *What is the average sentence length?*
b. *How many words does the longest sentence have? The shortest?*
c. *Rewrite the passage so that it contains only simple sentences in the normal sentence pattern: subject—verb—object.*
Does the rewritten passage communicate as well as the original?
Is it as interesting to read?
What methods were used in the original paragraph to vary the standard subject—verb—object pattern?

2

In writing headlines, editors often take liberties with sentence structure.

JUST NOT ENOUGH MEN,
MACHINES TO CLEAR SNOW

DISTRICT ATTORNEY
CANDIDATE SAYS LABOR
RANK, FILE DELUDED

HE LOSES OUT TO WIFE, DAUGHTER IN COURT

a. *Each headline can be read in two ways. What are they?*
b. *What were the editors trying to do that caused the ambiguity?*
c. *What are the alternative readings for each of the following:*

JONES CHARGES ERROR

POLICE STILL CRYING

AGENT FOUND DOPE ADDICT

Why can each headline be read in two ways?

3

We are often advised to "write the way we speak." The sentence structure of ordinary speech, however, is considerably looser than that of good writing. Some time ago we had occasion to record the discussion of a group of college seniors. Educated beyond the American average, they spoke what would be characterized as "good English." Yet the transcript of their discussion shows how rough it was

when measured by the standards for good written English that we have set up in this book:

RAOUL: I think the author is putting himself into the book whether he does it consciously or not. There are a lot of things about himself he doesn't know that is reflected in everything he does and writing is one of the things he does. When you read the book you actually see a picture of the author, maybe certain facets only, but you see him.

JANET: You have to consider that the author has one set of experiences and we—the reader—have another set of experiences and we can't possibly get all the same things out of it. Certain things are going to come up and hit us because we know something about them. If we are familiar with them. . . . If we are familiar with architecture, we see architectural terms. It's going to enrich the novel in that respect for us whereas perhaps someone who doesn't have that interest and that knowledge isn't going to catch that. I think every novel presents different opportunities for different people.

SCHUTTE: In your case, you as a home-economics student, are there places where you have found your knowledge of the way people live enriched by any of these books that we've read?

JANET: I get a tremendous amount out of a lot of these books. Just concerning my own profession because we feel, I very definitely feel, that home economics is one way in which we can help people to express themselves, to become individuals. We've already recognized the facts previously that there are so many areas in which we have to conform today. But in your home is one place where you can and should express yourself. And particularly in something like *Babbitt,* where I see such standardization. I carry this over and contrast with what I feel an ideal situation would be. What I'm for in life. In my profession.

SCHUTTE: Lewis, of course, pokes fun at the standardization in the American home at this time.

ED: Another way it would affect our profession would be many times we're doing something, for instance in a creative profession. You feel depressed at times because you just can't get what you want to get. And by reading novels sometimes we see the same thing. For instance a book like *Of Human Bondage,* where a person goes into a profession, goes into a profession for which he is not fit or thinks he is not fit and we read about it and it makes us feel better because we realize that there are other people that feel the same way and they make us aware of the situation we're in. We don't feel as bad as we did before.

Here is that same passage after it was reworked for publication:*

RAOUL: I think that an author puts himself into a book whether he does it consciously or not. There are a lot of things about himself he doesn't know, but they are reflected in everything he does, and writing is one of the things he does. When you read his book, you may well see a picture of the author—certain facets only perhaps—but you see him.

JANET: It seems to me that you have to consider that the author has one set of experiences and each reader has his own set of experiences. So no two people can possibly get all the same things out of his novel. For example, certain things are going to come up and hit me because I know something about them. If I'm familiar with architecture, the use of certain architectural terms will enrich the novel in that respect for me, whereas someone who doesn't have my knowledge of architecture will not be affected at all. I think every novel presents different opportunities for different people.

SCHUTTE: As a home-economics student, have you found your knowledge of the way people live enriched by any of the books that we've read?

JANET: Oh, I get a tremendous amount out of a lot of these books. We feel—and I very definitely feel—that home economics is one way in which we can help people to express themselves, to become individuals. We've already recognized in our discussion on earlier programs that there are many areas in which we have to conform today. But your home is one place where you can and should express yourself. And when I read a book like *Babbitt*, where I see such standardization carried to extremes, I have to contrast what happens there with what I feel, what an ideal situation would be.

SCHUTTE: Lewis of course pokes fun at the standardization in the American home.

ED: There is another way literature may affect our professional life. Many times when we're doing something, for instance in a creative profession, we feel depressed because we just can't get what we want to get. And by reading novels, sometimes we see the same situation. For instance take a book like *Of Human Bondage*, where the hero gets into a profession for which he is not fit or thinks he is not fit. When we read about him, it makes us feel better because we realize that there are other people that are in the situation we're in. We don't feel as bad as we did before.

* Reprinted from our article "What Good Is Literature Anyhow?" in the *Journal of Higher Education*, vol. 29 (June 1958), p. 326.

a. *Make a list of the specific differences between the two versions.*
b. *How do you account for the looseness of sentence structure in the first version?*
c. *Does the second version sound like people speaking?*
d. *If so, what devices help to give that impression?*
e. *If Janet were writing for publication the ideas which she expressed in the discussion, would she use the tone and sentence structure of the revised version? If not, how would she be likely to alter them? Why?*
f. *What do people really mean when they say "Write as you speak"?*

4

One of the most useful devices available to any writer is parallel structure. Some of the illustrative materials for other chapters make good use of it. Here are four more examples. Study them carefully:

Now if Nature should intermit her course, and leave altogether, though it were but for a while, the observation of her own laws; if those principal and mother elements of the world, whereof all things in this lower world are made, should lose the qualities which now they have; if the frame of that heavenly arch erected over our heads should loosen and dissolve itself; if celestial spheres should forget their wonted motions, and by irregular volubility turn themselves any way as might happen; if the prince of the lights of Heaven, which now as a giant doth run his unwearied course, should as it were through a languishing faintness begin to stand and to rest himself; if the moon should wander from her beaten way, the times and seasons of the year blend themselves by disordered and confused mixture, the winds breathe out their last gasp, the clouds yield no rain, the earth be defeated of heavenly influence, the fruits of the earth pine away as children at the withered breasts of their mother no longer able to yield them relief; what would become of man himself, whom these things now do all serve? See we not plainly, that obedience of creatures unto the law of nature is the stay of the whole world?*

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though

* Richard Hooker, *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (1594–1597), Bk. I, Sec. 3 (New York: Everyman's Library, 1907), 1:157.

I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth; but whether there shall be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.*

The Atlantic frontier was compounded of fisherman, fur-trader, miner, cattle-raiser, and farmer. Excepting the fisherman, each type of industry was on the march toward the West, impelled by an irresistible attraction. Each passed in successive waves across the continent. Stand at Cumberland Gap and watch the procession of civilization, marching single file—the buffalo following the trail to the salt springs, the Indian, the fur-trader and hunter, the cattle-raiser, the pioneer farmer—and the frontier has passed by. Stand at South Pass in the Rockies a century later and see the same procession with wider intervals between. The unequal rate of advance compels us to distinguish the frontier into the trader's frontier, the rancher's frontier, or the miner's frontier, and the farmer's frontier. When the mines and the cow pens were still near the fall line the traders' pack trains were tinkling across the Alleghenies, and the French on the Great Lakes were fortifying their posts, alarmed by the British trader's birch canoe. When the trappers scaled the Rockies, the farmer was still near the mouth of the Missouri.†

* I *Corinthians* xiii.

† Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1920), p. 12.

Primarily for the accompanying reasons, sales for the following products exceeded expectations: *Dorene*—sale of two barges in one month to the Biloxi Gulf Company for inventory; *Noxene*—customer buying in advance of a May first price increase; *Stalene*—increased participation in the automotive industry's purchases, and continued high level of its activity; *Doradel*—strong market for aluminum; *Noxadel*—completion of a 5,000 ton order to the Birmingham-Southern Company and the high level of the pulp business; *Staladel*—continued maximum production and strong sales; *Hi-Gloss*—final shipments to the Shoreham Company, a 1000-ton shipment to the Memphis-Ajax Company, and a 900-ton export shipment for French air bases; *Nap-Tex*—continued high level of activity in the distilling industry; *Ben-Tex*—earlier than expected availability of a barge in which a shipment of benzol was made to the Frontenac Company.

5

A good writer can use a number of pronouns in the same paragraph without misleading his reader. Here is a passage from the work of a famous scientist, Thomas Henry Huxley.*

Do not allow yourselves to be misled by the common notion that an hypothesis is untrustworthy simply because it is an hypothesis. It is often urged, in respect to some scientific conclusion, that, after all, it is only an hypothesis. But what more have we to guide us in nine-tenths of the most important affairs of daily life than hypotheses, and often very ill-based ones? So that in science, where the evidence of any hypothesis is subjected to the most rigid examination, we may rightly pursue the same course. You may have hypotheses and hypotheses. A man may say, if he likes, that the moon is made of green cheese: that is an hypothesis. But another man, who has devoted a great deal of time and attention to the subject, and availed himself of the most powerful telescopes and the results of the observations of others, declares that in his opinion it is probably composed of materials very similar to those of which our own earth is made up: and that is also only an hypothesis. But I need not tell you that there is an enormous difference in the value of the two hypotheses. That one which is based on sound scientific knowledge is sure to have a corresponding value; and that which is a mere hasty random guess is likely to have but little value.

* *Darwiniana* in *Works,* Westminster Edition (New York and London: D. Appleton and Company, 1893), 2:374–375.

a. *How many different pronouns does Huxley use?*
b. *Are any of them ambiguous?*
c. *Who is* I, *who is* you, *and who are* we *in this passage?*
d. *How does Huxley's use of* you *affect the tone of the passage?*

Materials for Revision

The following items contain examples of certain errors discussed in this chapter. Revising them will reinforce your understanding of the problems involved and your ability to recognize similar mistakes and to avoid making them in your own writing. The items have been arranged in groups, each of which represents a specific type of error.

A

1. Under the best of these conditions there exists a 215°F thermal shock and under the worst conditions the shock amounts to 480°F.
2. We are anxious to keep abreast of this situation and would appreciate your advising us as to when you now expect that these cars will be used and will you be able to release them for use in other sections of the country.
3. Based on our sales price of 1951 this shows an increase of 11½% on bare surface or 18% if surfaces are painted.
4. The pattern of new orders remained essentially unchanged. Increased orders were reported by 34%, and 48% reported their order books unchanged. 18% state new orders decreased. Of the members who responded to a special question, 52% say capital expenditures will be higher in 1956 than in 1955; 33% report they will be about the same, and 15% say less will be spent.
5. This statement is broken down into three categories. First, all items which have been set up in salesman's and/or office quotas are shown in the first category. The second category covers district quotas not assigned to individual salesmen. Category three covers all items which are excluded from the 1956 incentive plan.
6. The isolation valves are never shut except for repair or replacement of the relief valves or piping, or to check the set pressure of the relief valves.
7. The sample is removed from the kiln. Allow to cool at least 12 hours. Apply two coats of .5 mil wet thickness each. Allow to dry at least 6 hours between coats. The finish coat is applied after 24 hours.
8. This additional billing will include three shipments, the first one made on January 3 under invoice 80/27, shipment on January 16 covered on invoice 80/140, and shipment on February 10 covered on invoice 80/384.

9. Their company is more anxious to do business with us than our competitors due to the previous association with Paul Friend of Deer-Friend Company, and because Pliagloss is better known in their area.
10. It can be used on all surfaces which are now hand brushed where it is possible to drive a truck within 50 feet of the area or in the case of a horizontal surface 100 feet would present no difficulty.
11. *Application.* The coating may be either brushed or sprayed. Apply two coats of 10 mil wet thickness each. Do not use coating more than four hours after it has been cured. The second coat is applied after 24 hours.
12. On costs for handling the shipment of this material we can give you the following estimates: drums will cost \$6.16 each, our filling costs will run .014 (1.4¢) per gallon, loading into trucks would cost .003¢ per gallon, and loading into box cars would cost .005¢ per gallon.
13. We attach two copies of Newfield's test reports. We suggest that one copy be sent to Carey, pointing out how their felt is not uniform to as great a degree as desirable and which we believe they can improve on.
14. At that time the plant had a poor rating; rejects were frequent; safety plan, fire protection, and fire drills were inadequate; the binding machines were badly mounted and in need of repairs; the foreman's office and plant lighting were very unsatisfactory.
15. Obviously if the income figures are to be of any value for measuring distributor operations or in determining our prices, the rate structure must be kept on a current basis.
16. Attached are three tables covering our proposals:
    Table 1 contains eight different kinds of tests . . .
    Table 2 lists the various coating systems . . .
    Finally, in Table 3, we have attempted to indicate a time schedule . . .
17. This recommendation is made for the following reasons:
    A. The expenditure will give a 24% yearly return . . .
    B. The New England Fleet is composed of 30 complete units . . .
    C. There is a scarcity of hired equipment available . . .
    D. This expenditure will allow us to cut costs . . .
    E. The expenditure of these funds will allow us to handle an additional 600,000 gallons of application . . .
    F. The district presents its request for the \$100,000 expenditure on the following basis.
       (1) . . .
       (2) . . .
18. It is proposed to measure and record during each run:
    1. The vehicle will be traveling at full speed on level ground when it enters the course. Two satisfactory runs, with and against the wind, will be made.
    2. Time over the measured course traveling with and against the wind.

3. Recording of the measured weight of the fuel used per hour by the main engines.
4. Exhaust temperatures for each cylinder of the main engines.

19. Precautions:
    1. Make certain that temperature is below 300°F and that pressure is 45 psi or lower before starting.
    2. Initiate cooling methods if water temperature exceeds 300°F.
    3. System components may be damaged if overheated. Consult appropriate personnel if failure occurs.
20. We do not believe that this method will be as accurate as you require for the following reasons:
    1. Estimated weights are shown in those cases where weighing facilities are not readily available. If we waited for correct weights, this would delay preparation and receipt of the report.
    2. Quantities are shown both in pounds and gallons. To arbitrarily use a pounds-per-gallon figure would not be too accurate as the weight of a gallon varies by commodity.
    3. Duplication of figures. There are times when a shipment is shown twice. This occurs when a shipment is made on one day but complete billing information is not available. It is again shown when the shipment is invoiced to the customer.
    4. Omission of shipments. At times rush shipments are made after the shipment sheet is prepared and is not shown later. Also, some customers request billing once a month and not all shipments are recorded.
    5. Incorrect descriptions. At times, the plants incorrectly interchange commodities and consignees.
    6. Consigned to destination. In this space is shown the consignee's name, which is not always the company to which the material is sold.
21. For example a project engineer, on a certain control system, spent 30% of his working time speaking and 15% in written communication.
22. Are you interested in determining the amount of compaction that occurs upon storage or is it to determine the "body" of the material?

B

1. Confirming our recent discussion with Mr. Brown, the governor has requested that a study be made to determine the investment required and the advantages to be derived from improved traffic control at the Cornwall Interchange.
2. On rechecking our field work performed at Southern Pipe, it was indicated that the bond on the interior of the pipe was completely satisfactory after several days.
3. Unlike a roof inspection, which is readily accessible and can be rechecked

by a local representative without the use of rigging and scaffolding, two skilled men, who are not normally available locally, are required to make the tank inspection.

4. Upon examination of the fabric which had been removed from the testing machine, there was a definite increase in wear noted on the untreated samples.
5. On drying, some cracks will appear, so it is necessary to fill these with the new compound and add another coat of paint.
6. Upon questioning to determine the trouble with the valve, it was learned that the valve had not been functioning properly for the past two weeks.
7. When discussing the removal of this amount of solids from the gas, it was felt that probably fiber gas filters or electronic precipitators would be required.
8. Supplementing my letter of November 28 on above subject, the Department of Agriculture has indicated that farmers will purchase about 4 million gallons in 1956.

C

1. If your customer is in need of bearings and you care to give us their name, we will be pleased to communicate with them.
2. Since our conversation last week, we have received several inquiries about this clause in the contract.
3. These reports are involved with trips on new contracts with companies who we are subcontracting with. These reports are very important.
4. We are aware that shipping the exact amount requested is sometimes difficult, but not knowing how close the customer orders to his requirements it is best that we supply them with a little more than they asked for rather than short change them.
5. These accounts, which remain unpaid, were discussed at length in our letters of April 21, May 16, June 7, and July 3. It was also the subject of our telephone call last week.
6. On arrival here we enter the first phase of this orientation program. This lasted for two weeks.
7. Confirming our telephone conversation of this morning in regard to the above customer, we have received word from Chicago that they will have the material by January 17 or 18.
8. In accordance with our recent telephone conversation we have checked with our Newark plant to obtain further information.
9. After the orientation program I was sent to Methods School. Methods School is a four-week course designed to acquaint new employees of the company with company methods.

10. On March 15, 1956 we issued additional billing for 490 gallons on our invoice 86–9090 in the amount of $106.33. This invoice should now be in your possession. On this invoice you will note that payment is to be made in 10 days.
11. We are attaching our Invoices 589/66 and 589/67. These invoices cover additional prepaid freight charges on Barge XYZ 273 and Prince 479.
12. The second major classification would be interdepartmental memorandums. This is a letter that distributes and requests information.

D

1. Following the acquisition by private companies of the five large government-owned synthetic rubber plants, Oxene purchase agreements were negotiated with the new owners.
2. The schedule for increased salaried employees group-life insurance will be offered to salaried employees.
3. There seems to be ample market to support a 24,000,000 to 30,000,000-pound per-year sale in New York state.
4. The survey of the organizational and procedural problems of the Jones and Warfield Chemical Division's district sales offices was continuous during the month.
5. The result of the recent extensive evaluation of the use of this new low-molecular-weight bulk polymer have shown this new product to be preferable.
6. The 60-ampere unused disconnect fused switch is convenient.
7. The plastic fire clay-burner eye liners are crumbling.
8. You were sent advertising copy covering the above subject semimonthly long-range tooth-paste *vs.* tooth-powder saturation ads for the Chicago papers.

9. Punctuation

Problems of sentence structure lead inevitably to a consideration of punctuation.

"That," we have been told, "is an easy one. You just hire a good secretary, and she'll take care of your punctuation." In the best of all possible business worlds, this solution might sometimes be satisfactory. But in the business world today few secretaries are really capable of punctuating for the boss—though there are many bosses who *think* their secretaries are capable of doing so. In routine matters a secretary may handle punctuation. But any executive who writes important letters, reports, and memoranda knows that punctuation has an important and sometimes subtle effect on meaning; it is something which he cannot afford to let anyone else "take care of." Only if he has a thorough understanding of the function and conventions of punctuation and puts them to use, can he be sure that each piece of writing which leaves his desk will express accurately what he wants to say.

The Function of Punctuation

A mark of punctuation serves much the same function as a road sign. It guides the reader, telling him when to stop, when to slow down, and sometimes what road conditions to expect immediately ahead. Read the following sentence at a normal reading pace.

> **The product pattern of this plant has changed requiring the installation of the column and allied equipment and space availability is such that congestion cannot be avoided.**

This sentence—on the fourth page of a report to management—stopped a vice president cold. By the time he hit it, he had gathered considerable momentum in his reading and was moving along at a good clip. For the vice president, meeting this sentence at this point was like driving into a brick wall which suddenly appeared. His reaction was in direct proportion to the shock he received.

Why did the vice president have this reaction? First of all, he had begun to read the sentence rapidly: "The product of this plant has changed requiring the installation. . . ." *Whoa,* he subconsciously told himself. *That doesn't make sense. Let's try it again.* "The product of this plant has changed [pause] requiring the installation. . . ." *Now I'm on the track again.* ". . . . requiring the installation of the column and allied equipment and space availability. . . ." *Whoa again! We can't install space availability.* Again he had to go back to put in an even longer pause after "equipment." Finally he had the meaning of the sentence clearly in mind. But he had been twice misled by the writer's failure to tell him when to pause, and each time he had to back up and retrace his steps. Understandably, he was annoyed.

The writer could easily have prevented his annoyance. A few road signs would have done the trick:

> **The product pattern of this plant has changed, requiring the installation of the column and allied equipment; and space availability is such that congestion cannot be avoided.**

Here the punctuation indicates very clearly both where and how long he should pause and what the relationship is between the ideas. Lack of proper punctuation slows a reader down. It forces him to stop and organize what appears to be merely a string of words—unless, of course, he simply throws the letter or report aside in irritation or frustration.

We should make one matter very clear from the start: punctuation marks are *not* exact equivalents of pauses in speech. It is true that one can generally tell whether what he has written is a "sentence" or not by reading it aloud. It is also true that with one particularly troublesome use of the comma, we will recommend listening as a useful test. But it is emphatically not true that one should use a comma in writing whenever he would pause in speaking. These days good writers tend—except where certain conven-

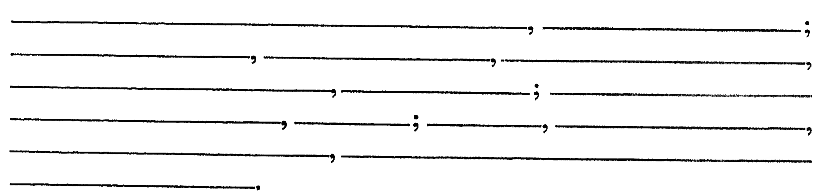
tions are involved—to use the minimum amount of punctuation that will assure exact communication. Interrupting a sentence with a series of unnecessary commas ("hiccuping commas," as one of our colleagues calls them) misleads the reader and disrupts his train of thought.

Punctuation in the Past

The tendency to cut down on punctuation can be largely traced to our using simpler sentence structure than we once did. To establish that trend clearly let us go back about 250 years. Here is a sentence from "Hints toward an Essay on Conversation" by Jonathan Swift, the author of *Gulliver's Travels:*

> The two chief ends of conversation are to entertain and improve those we are among, or to receive those benefits ourselves; which whoever will consider, cannot easily run into either of these two errors, because when any man speaks in company, it is to be supposed he does it for his hearers' sake, and not his own; so that common discretion will teach us not to force their attention, if they are not willing to lend it; nor, on the other side, to interrupt him who is in possession, because that is in the grossest manner to give the preference to our own good sense.

Here is what the punctuation in that sentence looks like:



Between the capital letter and the period, there are nine commas and three semicolons. Although Swift's sentences were often short and pithy, this one is by no means unusual in his writing. The essay from which we have quoted has some which are longer and more complex. In those days the structure of scientific writing was often equally complex and the punctuation equally heavy. Here is a passage on the dispersion of light from Newton's *A New Theory about Light and Colours,* published in 1672:

> In the year 1666 (at which time I applied myself to the grinding of optick glasses of other figures than spherical) I procured me a tri-

> **angular glass prism, to try therewith the celebrated phenomena of colours. And in order thereto, having darkened my chamber, and made a small hole in my window-shuts, to let in a convenient quantity of the sun's light, I placed my prism at its entrance, that it might be thereby refracted to the opposite wall. It was at first a very pleasing divertissement, to view the vivid and intense colours produced thereby; but after a while applying myself to consider them more circumspectly, I became surprised to see them in an oblong form; which, according to the received laws of refraction, I expected should have been circular.**

Here is the punctuation pattern of this passage:

```
————————————.——————(——————————————————————————)
——————————, ————————————. ————————————————————,
——————————————, ————————————————, —————————————,
——————————————, ——————————————. ———————————————,
———————————————————————; ——————————————————————
——————————————, ——————————————————————; ————————,
——————————————————————————, ——————————————————.
```

Some of Newton's punctuation is required by his use of more complicated sentence structures than we now use. Much of it, however, simply reflects the heavier punctuation that writers used in his time. Today, Newton's second sentence, whose structure is not particularly complex, would probably look like this:

> **And in order thereto, having darkened my chamber and made a small hole in my window-shuts to let in a convenient quantity of the sun's light, I placed my prism at its entrance that it might be thereby refracted to the opposite wall.**

Two commas instead of five!

Punctuation Today

Unfortunately, vestiges of the comma-sprinkling days remain. Here are two sentences from a recent report:

> **The main purpose of having a prescribed amount of Xeno in a phenol mix for use in resins, is to delay the set or hardening time. The reason for this is that Xeno is not nearly as reactive as Emeno, or 3,5 Artite.**

There is no logical reason here for defying the convention of not separating the subject from the verb with a mark of punctuation. The comma after *resins* does not clarify the meaning of the first sentence; it actually misleads the reader by suggesting that an interpolation is to follow. Instead he finds the verb. Only in rare instances is a subject so long or heavily modified that it must be tied up with a comma before the reader can proceed.

Nor is the comma necessary between *Emeno* and *or* in the second sentence. Here the chance of confusion is even greater, since the comma between the *3* and the *5* is necessary. The added comma suggests a series that is not intended, grouping the *or* with the *3*, and pulling the *3* away from the phrase in which it belongs—*3, 5 Artite:*

> . . . as Emeno, or 3, 5 Artite

Leaving commas out of sentences where they belong and putting them into sentences where they do not belong, then, can cause real trouble. What can be done about it? Let us move on to see how punctuation *should* be used.

In Chapter 8 we concluded that the material in a badly confused sentence could be presented either in tabular form:

Unusual maintenance expenses:	
Replacing tires on lift truck and equipping with LPG fuel	$ 700
Restocking machine shop with valves, fittings, etc.	400
Cleaning septic tank	150
Buying slag for yard	300
Increase in Total	$1,550

or in sentence form:

> Unusual maintenance expenses—replacing tires on lift truck and equipping with LPG fuel, $700; restocking machine shop with valves, fittings, etc., $400; cleaning septic tank, $150; and buying slag for the yard, $300—increased the total of this category by $1,550.

There are occasions, of course, when it is inappropriate to use a table. Moreover, basing the sentence on the table in this case produces an awkward structure with subject and verb widely separated. A re-sorting of the materials in the original sentence shows that the writer is trying to say two things: first, that "unusual maintenance expenses increased the total of this category by $1,550" and second, that this increase is caused by four specific items. The relationship of these two ideas is not coordinate. The

second part is an explanation of the first. Or, to put it another way, the first statement may be used to introduce a list of items which together add up to it. The colon indicates both of these relationships.

The Colon

The colon is a mark of anticipation, indicating to the reader that what is to follow is an explanation of a statement just made. Take the following sentences:

> Presented below for your consideration is an idea believed to have great economic potential. This idea is proper application of aptation to the coal-hydrogenation process.

There is an awkward repetition in the second sentence, the result of a clumsy attempt to relate the two sentences. The writer could have used a colon to relate the ideas more clearly:

> Presented below for your consideration is an idea believed to have great economic potential: proper application of aptation to the coal-hydrogenation process.

This revision avoids the awkward repetition. It also presents the new idea dramatically and forcefully. Letter and report writers could use the colon in this way much more than they do.

The second use of the colon, to introduce a list, is common:

> Under the circumstances, we hope that you will provide us with the following: 600 gross of No. 2 pencils, to be sent to Mr. Murphy; 30 reams of typewriter paper, 20-pound weight; and 45 B&B combination bicycle locks.

The only criticism that can be made of this example is that the writer did not need the words *the following:* the colon means *the following.*

The Comma

The best way to look at the three major marks of punctuation—the comma, the semicolon, and the period—is to recognize that they stand for

increasing degrees of stop or separation. A comma will generally suffice to indicate the separation between the independent clauses of a compound sentence:

> Hydrogenolysis of XVI in the presence of Raney nickel gave XVIII, and iodide ion was shown to be present in the aqueous washings from the reaction mixture.

Short compound sentences may be written without the separating comma.

Commas may be used between the items in a series of words, phrases, or clauses:

> Let us eat, drink, and be merry.
>
> We discussed advertising techniques used in local papers, on the radio, and on television.
>
> January 16 came, the offer expired, and we no longer were able to supply the spoons as premiums.

after an introductory (subordinate) clause or long phrase:

> Because we can expect a return of 9.2 percent, this will be a good investment. By acting as promptly and as vigorously as possible, we should be able to close the deal before Jones can disrupt our plans.

around words or phrases that interrupt an idea:

> I submit, therefore, that we have proven our case.
>
> Items IV and V, both products of unsymmetrical Ullmann couplings, were combined in 24 percent yields.

around nonrestrictive phrases and clauses (explained more fully on pp. 173–174):

> Jones, an importer of diamonds, will come along.
> Gilson's sketches, which I have mailed separately, will show you exactly what I mean.

and in certain places established by convention:

> November 15, 1920
> 72,436,519
> Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
> John E. Frank, Jr.

We have listed only the most common uses of the comma. There are, of course, others.

The Semicolon

The semicolon is a heavier mark of punctuation than the comma. It is used when, for reasons of style or meaning, a greater degree of separation than that afforded by the comma is needed but the material to be separated is closely enough related to belong in the same sentence. In a compound sentence a semicolon may be used instead of a comma to suggest a greater distinction between the two coordinate items:

> **Hydrogenolysis of XVI in the presence of Raney nickel gave XVIII; and iodide ion was shown to be present in the aqueous washings from the reaction mixture.**

Similarly, a semicolon is used when a conjunctive adverb introduces the second of two main clauses in a sentence:

> **This may well turn out to be a losing proposition; however, we must undertake it.**

We may, if we wish, substitute a period for the semicolon. If we move *however* into the second clause, we should—with rare exceptions—always do so:

> **This may well turn out to be a losing proposition. We must, however, undertake it.**

When the members of a series have submembers separated by commas, semicolons will provide the necessary clarity:

> **Please place the following order with Auto Parts, Inc.: 10 cigar lighters, 7 electric clocks, 8 radios; 6 grille assemblies, 3 right-side panels; and 10 tires.**

The semicolons distinguish between items for the automobile dashboard, for the automobile body, and for the wheels. Such grouping makes it easier for the reader to grasp the message and to follow instructions.

In the sentence about unusual maintenance expenses (p. 168), the colon indicates accurately the relationship between the two parts or sections. But the second section has four parts, each of which has at least another two parts: the reason for the expenditure and the amount of the expenditure. In addition, one of the reasons for an expenditure has three parts:

> **restocking machine shop with valves**
> **fittings**
> **etc.**

All of these parts, subparts, and sub-subparts must be properly related. Commas alone will not do the job adequately; semicolons must be used to indicate major divisions:

> Unusual maintenance expenses increased the total of this category by $1,550: replacing tires on lift truck and equipping with LPG fuel, $700; restocking machine shop with valves, fittings, etc., $400; cleaning septic tank, $150; and buying slag for the yard, $300.

This version communicates clearly. Some writers may prefer to distinguish even more clearly between the items following the colon by separating each item from the amount of expense with a dash instead of a comma:

> Unusual maintenance expenses increased the total of this category by $1,550: replacing tires on lift truck and equipping with LPG fuel—$700; restocking machine shop with valves, fittings, etc.—$400; cleaning septic tank—$150; and buying slag for the yard—$300.

The Dash

Too many people in business misuse the dash, employing it in place of a comma, semicolon, or colon. It is not an all-purpose punctuation mark and should not be used indiscriminately. When used in place of another mark of punctuation, it misleads the reader. Properly used, however, it can be very helpful.

Dashes can set off a parenthetical statement which the author wants to emphasize:

> The time will come—and it may be soon—when we will be looking for customers.

A dash serves somewhat the same function when it is used at the end of a statement to point up an observation added for emphasis, or an expansion of a something already said:

> We can no longer ignore the problem that Brown raises—that the Poli-plane line is losing money.

> Brown and Smithson have provided the answer that we needed—the answer to the constantly increasing overhead.

Definitions or lists can be similarly set off:

> Shellfish—oysters, clams, crabs, shrimp, lobsters—must be transported with care.

> Do not confuse an engine—a mechanism which converts raw materials into energy—with a machine—a mechanism which converts one kind of energy into another.

A dash also connects a summarizing statement in a sentence to a series of parallel elements:

> To direct, to lead, to persuade, to encourage—all these are the functions of a supervisor.

Punctuation of Restrictive and Nonrestrictive Modifiers

The matter of restrictive and nonrestrictive modifiers needs some further elaboration, for it is probably the most difficult aspect of punctuation to understand. Take the following sentence:

> Could you send the inspector to Denver, where we have the books he will want to see?

The reader of the letter knew that Denver meant Denver, Colorado, the home office of the firm from which the letter came. The clause "where we have the books he will want to see" was intended as additional information for the reader, not to indicate which one of several possible Denvers is referred to.

In the following sentence, however, the subordinate clause serves another function:

> Send this shipment to the warehouse in which we store machine tools.

This sentence indicates that there are several warehouses and that the shipment must go to a specific one, the one in which machine tools are stored. If the *in which* clause were preceded by a comma, the reader would infer that there was only one warehouse and that machine tools (perhaps along with other things) were stored in it:

> Send this shipment to the warehouse, in which we store machine tools.

Restrictive clauses restrict, define, or identify the words they modify. Nonrestrictive clauses simply give additional (but not necessarily unimportant) information.

Single words and phrases, as modifiers, can also be either nonrestrictive or restrictive:

Hyglow, our enamel paint, would be best for your purposes.

Our enamel paint, Hyglow, would be best for your purposes.

From these sentences we assume that the company produces only one enamel paint: Hyglow. If the company produced two varieties of enamel paint, Hyglow and Hysheen, the modifier would have to be restrictive, indicating which enamel paint the writer recommends:

Our enamel paint Hyglow would be best for your purposes.

Hyglow restricts the meaning of "Our enamel paint." The lack of commas indicates that the company puts out more than one enamel and that the word *Hyglow* specifies which one.

There are two tests which help a writer to decide whether a modifier or clause is nonrestrictive or restrictive (i.e., whether it should be set off by commas or not). The first is to read the sentence meaningfully aloud. He will find that he will pause slightly just before some modifiers, a signal that a comma may be required. When he finds himself hurrying right on from the word modified to the modifier without a break, he probably will need no punctuation. A little practice will develop an ear, and an eye, sensitive to the difference.

The second test is to read the sentence without the modifier. If the *basic meaning* of the sentence remains unchanged, the modifier is nonrestrictive and should be set off with a comma or commas. If the meaning of the sentence is significantly altered, the modifier is restrictive and must not be set off. If a plantation manager wanted to give instructions on what to do with cured tobacco, he might write:

Send tobacco which has been cured to Warehouse 7.

Leaving out the clause "which has been cured" changes the meaning of the sentence completely. Without the clause the statement is an order to send all tobacco, cured and uncured, to Warehouse 7. The clause is restrictive.

These listening tests are not infallible and in the long run will not replace real understanding of the nature of restrictive and nonrestrictive modifiers. But they do provide a practical approach.

Multiple Punctuation

Another problem which plagues letter and report writers is the position of quotation marks in relation to other marks of punctuation:

> **I doubt that it was marked "office copy only."**
>
> **I doubt that it was marked "office copy only," for Jones is always very careful about confidential information.**
>
> **I doubt that it was marked "office copy only"; Jones is always very careful about confidential information.**

Or

> **I doubt that it was marked "office copy only": Jones is always very careful about confidential information.**

In standard American usage, established by the printers, a period or comma is always placed *inside* and a colon or semicolon *outside* the quotation mark. In neither case is any consideration given to where they "ought" to go.

The question mark and exclamation mark, however, are always placed inside or outside the quotation mark on the basis of whether they belong with the quoted matter or with the whole sentence:

> **Jack said to me, "Do you want 100 gallons?"**
> **Did Jack say, "I want 100 gallons"?**
> **Jack said, "I want 100 gallons!"**
> **Jack said, "I want 100 gallons"!**

The punctuation of the third sentence indicates that Jack put a lot of power behind his demand for 100 gallons. The punctuation of the last sentence indicates that the writer is surprised or even shocked that Jack should have asked for 100 gallons; Jack himself may have made his request in the quietest and most reasonable manner.

Printers place a period or comma within the quotation mark because placing it outside the quotation mark leaves too much white space following. With the comma or period inside the quotation mark, less empty space is required and the text looks better on the page. In Great Britain, the comma and period are placed either inside or outside the quotation mark depending upon whether they are a part of the phrase being quoted. Unfortunately, Americans see this British usage just often enough to pick up what is in the United States a "wrong" practice. There is something to be

said, of course, for both customs. Since standard American usage calls for the comma or period inside the quotation mark, however, it makes little sense to argue the case on grounds of "logic." Standards of grammar and punctuation are often no more logical than standards of dress. Indeed, if one had the inclination and the energy to argue over the relative positions of the comma and quotation mark, he might better challenge the custom which allows a woman to enter a restaurant on a sweltering summer evening with bare arms and shoulders but which requires her escort to wear shirt, tie, and jacket.

Dashes are never used in conjunction with commas or semicolons. Even where the use of both the dash and another mark of punctuation seems logical, one mark functions for both. Thus, one must not write

> **Johnson and Company have no choice—they must sell—, but they don't know it yet.**

but

> **Johnson and Company have no choice—they must sell—but they don't know it yet.**

or

> **Johnson and Company have no choice—they must sell; but they don't know it yet.**

The dash normally takes precedence over the comma, the semicolon over the dash.

Probably because punctuation is misused so frequently, the courts have long held that:

> **In a document which contains punctuation marks, the words, and not the punctuation, are the controlling guide in its construction. *Lambert* v. *People*, 76 N.Y. 220, 32 Am. Rep. 293. Punctuation is no part of the English language. It is always subordinate to the text. . . . *Ewing* v. *Burnet*, 11 Pet. (36 U.S.) 41, 54, 9L. Ed. 624. Punctuation in writings, therefore, may sometimes shed light upon the meaning of the parties but it must never be allowed to overturn what seems the plain meaning of the whole document. *Osborn* v. *Farwell*, 87, 29 Am. Rep. 47.***

Although a grammarian might question the statement that "Punctuation is no part of the English language," he would probably agree that a

* *Travelers' Insurance Co.* v. *Pomerants et al.*, 207 N.Y. Supp. 81 (Supreme Court of New York, New York County, 1924).

court should attempt to determine what was intended by a piece of writing and not allow justice to be frustrated by a carelessly or ignorantly placed comma.

This ruling, however, is no justification for using punctuation carelessly. If a wholesaler offers a haberdasher an exclusive on a new line of "ties, shirts, wash 'n' wear slacks and suits," he may well be in trouble—if the suits are not wash 'n' wear. What does he do if the haberdasher says that because he did not get wash and wear suits, he will not pay his bill? The haberdasher will certainly not be happy when the wholesaler explains that only the slacks are washable and that there should have been a comma before the *and*. The wholesaler could take the matter to court and get a judgment, perhaps in his favor. But that would certainly lose a customer. Our wholesaler is fictional, but mistakes of this sort occur in business every day. They do not win friends.

Punctuation, then, is a matter of vital concern to any businessman who wants to write well. He need not memorize a bookful of rules to punctuate accurately. He does need to understand the conventions. Much more important, he needs to understand the function of punctuation—to clarify the relationships between words or groups of words—and to use this understanding in selecting and placing the commas, semicolons, colons, and other punctuation marks available to him.

Illustrative Materials

1

The Inventor of the Period*

By K. Jason Sitewell

Soon there will occur an event of profound importance to the literatures of all languages. I refer to the 2500th birthday of Kohmar Pehriad (544–493 B.C.), inventor of punctuation in written language. He also figures prominently in the development of copyright law, which I shall dis-

* From *The Saturday Review of Literature*, March 24, 1956, pp. 15–16.

cuss in a moment. Pehriad was the leading literary figure of Macedonia in the pre-Christian era. His writings ranged from poetry to speculations on astronomy and physics. Few of these writings remain. What does remain, however, is his successful reform of written language in virtually all tongues.

In those days written language was continuous. There were no sentence or paragraph breaks. Pehriad's own writings represent the first recorded use of the small round dot to indicate the end of a completed unit of expression. More important than that is the fact that he gave thirty years of his life, traveling throughout ancient Greece, Rome, Persia, North Africa, and Asia, in the effort to obtain local acceptance of the small dot that has since done so much for literature.

His first great success outside his country came when he was able to persuade some Greek scholars to issue a complete version of Homer's *Odyssey* and *Iliad,* with the small round dots in the proper places. Up to that time Homer had had a limited following in Greece. With the reformed version, however, his work gained widespread acceptance. Pehriad's next success came in Constantinople, where he was directly responsible for the first manuscript of the Hebrew Torah containing periods.

As he traveled from place to place the logic of Pehriad's argument became increasingly accepted. It was not necessary, he reasoned, for each language to devise its own mark to denote a proper pause. The small round dot could be used in all languages. The stark simplicity of this idea, amounting virtually to genius, is doubtless responsible for the fact that every written language in the world today uses the small round dot. Thus, Pehriad's contribution is not only to his own country but to mankind.

Pehriad's reward, of course, is that the small round dot has been named after him, our spelling of his name having been anglicized. Even in a country as remote as Nepal the influence of Pehriad today is to be found in the fact that the sentence dot is called a "puhyed." In China it is called a "pi-yen." In Malaya, "pee-yeed." In New Guinea the capital *P* is used as a gesture of respect to the inventor in its word, "Peeliod."

Pehriad's efforts did not stop with the period. He was also concerned with the need for an appropriate marking that might correspond to the pause in a person's speech in the middle of an incompleted sentence. This led him to devise what we now know as the comma, also named after him (Kohmar). It is interesting to read in his *Journal* that he later felt he had made a mistake in not using the comma marking instead of the period and vice-versa. "The dot with the curved descending tail is the more impressive and visible mark and should therefore have been used for the more im-

portant purpose of indicating the end of a sentence," he wrote. "The dot slows up the reader and should therefore have been used to indicate a pause." Pehriad, in his declining years, sought to bring about this shift in comma-period usage, but by this time the custom had hardened.

It remained for Pehriad's son to devise yet other markings for the purpose of strengthening the written language. Apos-Trophe Pehriad felt that the comma was adaptable to a wide variety of purposes, so long as its position could be varied. He used it inside a word to denote the abbreviation; at the end of a word to denote possession; in tandem to denote quotation. As in the case of his father, his invention bears his name.

There is no evidence that the Pehriads, father or son, invented either the question mark or the exclamation point. The younger Pehriad, however, did attempt to indicate emphasis inside a sentence. If the emotion registered in the pronunciation of a word was scorn or anger he placed a concave curve atop the key word so emphasized. If a person wished to give a sorrowful or sad expression to a word the marking was a convex curve below the word. If a person's speech was staccato or jerky young Pehriad required the writer to put down each word slantwise. One shudders at the difficulties this would have caused printers had the reform been generally adopted.

The historical verdict on young Pehriad must be that, outside of his juggling of commas so that they became apostrophes or quotation marks, he lacked the simple directness and the judgment that made his father the only literary figure in history whose contribution is visible in almost every piece of writing anywhere in the world, except, of course, in the poetry of e e cummings and other modern innovators.

But the significance of the Pehriads is not confined to the small round dot or the comma. I wrote at the start that they figured indirectly in the development of copyright law. What happened was that a descendant of Apos-Trophe and of Pehriad moved to Rome, where he became a highly successful counselor-at-law. Pehriad Apullus had proper pride in the family name but had always felt that his ancestors had been inexcusably amateurish and unbusinesslike. Apullus set out to earn for himself the tangible rewards that he felt the old folks had overlooked. Under old Roman law direct descendants could obtain legal rights to inventions if their forbears had neglected to take out patents.

Apullus had considerable influence in the Roman courts. He contended that the period was an invention and therefore subject to royalties. To demonstrate his highmindedness he informed the court that, though he would insist on full rights to the period, he would make a gift of the comma

to the state. Impressed by the fairness of the man, the court granted him a copyright on the period, and prescribed a fee of one drachma for any piece of writing containing more than 100 periods. Manuscripts containing upwards of 500 periods were to bring a flat royalty of ten drachmas. This marked the beginning of the short essay in ancient Rome.

Apullus discreetly waited several years before moving for an extension of his copyright to include any piece of writing, whatever the length and whatever the nature. Even private letters were to be subject to royalty for the use of periods. By this time he had insinuated himself into the circle of those closest to Octavius. Rome was sorely pressed for funds and it was Apullus's ingenious proposal to Octavius that, in addition to extending his royalty to include any use of periods, the Government should collect a modest tax.

Serious consideration was given to this idea but it was eventually discarded because of the tremendous increase it would require in the number of tax investigators. There was also some apprehension in Government quarters that many citizens would circumvent the law by using substitute markings instead of periods.

In any event, during the period of the debate general fear spread through the populace. Suetonius, in his *Lives of the Twelve Caesars,* writes that the general citizenry came close to giving up writing altogether for fear that some retroactive law would be passed compelling them to pay both royalty and tax on every period they had ever used in their lifetimes. As might be expected, this led to incredibly involved, non-stop sentences, clear traces of which are still discernible in modern times.

In an attempt to ridicule the proposed law some people exclaimed "period" in the proper places during their conversation. This habit has persisted to the present day.

Eventually the situation in ancient Rome was straightened out. In the course of so doing, Roman law devised what Anglo-Saxon law commonly accepts as the basis for copyright. Recognizing that some time limit ought to be set to the benefits Apullus would derive from his copyright, the Roman courts decreed that beyond Apullus's generation no royalties would be paid. A complicating factor, of course, in terms of precedent, involved the original inventor of the period, who had received no rewards for his work. This is what led the Roman courts to decree that the benefits of copyright should be limited to a single generation, or twenty-six years, except where a son may wish to extend it, in which case it would run for another twenty-six years. But the absolute limit was fixed at fifty-two years.

Outside his native Macedonia and, to a lesser extent, Italy the inventor of the period is not generally recognized. The 2500th anniversary of his birth (April 1, A.F.D.) gives all of us a long-deferred opportunity to pay homage to a man who has made written language not only intelligible but possible. The period did not come about by accident. Someone had to invent it and fight for it.

2

Sometimes we do not realize the importance of punctuation until we try to do without it. You have already read the following passage. Read it again, this time without punctuation, and, of course, without capitalization.

frequently of course an actor does not act on anything tom sneezed or the saw slipped there are also situations in which no actor is specified the letter was filed or the experiment was finished the writer presumably could tell his reader who filed the letter or who finished the experiment but there may be no point in his doing so we often have no immediate interest at all in who has done a job whenever this is the case the passive is appropriate we use it when our interest is primarily in the action performed and person or thing receiving the action if we wish to describe an experiment in a chemistry text we are not at all interested either in who first did the experiment or in the student who will repeat it in the laboratory we are interested rather in the operations involved so we may use the passive as does the author of this textbook description of the equipment for an experiment involving an induction motor

> the purpose of the experiment is to investigate the effect of a variable rotor resistance upon the starting torque and current it is advisable to use the same stator as in the preceding experiment a suitable prony brake must be provided preferably of the self-recording type because the starting torque of a phase-wound rotor varies considerably in its different positions with respect to the stator it is essential therefore to note several values of the torque with the same setting of the secondary rheostat moving the rotor by a small angle at a time a self-recording brake or stationary torque recorder can be improvised out of an ordinary prony brake a spring balance and a steam-engine indicator an ammeter should be provided in each stator phase and in each rotor phase so that the re-

sistances in the three phases can be balanced unless a special balanced three-phase resistor is available when readings in one phase are sufficient stator watts should be measured and voltmeters should be provided for the line voltage and that between the slip-rings if it is necessary to balance the resistances it may be convenient to connect the voltmeter in succession between each of the sliprings and the neutral point a reliable indicating tachometer should be connected to the shaft all the tests specified below are to be performed at the rated stator voltage and supply frequency.

Even though you have read this material once before, you will have found it difficult going.

a. *Punctuate the passage without looking back.*

b. *Now compare your version with the original on page 112.*
   (1) *Is your punctuation similar to that of the original?*
   (2) *Where there are differences, does your punctuation change the meaning of the original? In what specific ways?*
   (3) *On the basis of what you have discovered in this experiment, can you state two or three fundamental principles of punctuation which you can use to improve your own ability to use punctuation effectively?*

c. *We have deliberately included two different kinds of writing in this experiment: technical and nontechnical.*
   (1) *Can either kind do without punctuation?*
   (2) *Which was harder for you to punctuate? Why?*

3

In listening to an appeal, the students on a Disciplinary Committee disagreed over the meaning of the following passage in their handbook:

To pass a course a student must (1) hand in all the assignments; (2) attend at least thirty-two (32) of the forty-five (45) scheduled classes and (3) attend the last scheduled class before and the first scheduled class after all vacations; unless he is prevented from doing so by the scheduling of a plant trip for him by his department.

a. *As the passage is punctuated, to what does the* unless *clause refer?*
b. *How should the passage be punctuated to make the* unless *clause modify* (1), (2), *and* (3)?

c. *How should it be punctuated to make the* unless *clause modify only* (3)?

4

*Here is a one-sentence paragraph of 188 words.**

To consider the world in its length and breadth, its various history, the many races of man, their starts, their fortunes, their mutual alienation, their conflicts; and then their ways, habits, governments, forms of worship; their enterprises, their aimless courses, their random achievements and acquirements, the impotent conclusion of long-standing facts, the tokens so faint and broken of a superintending design, the blind evolution of what turn out to be great powers or truths, the progress of things, as if from unreasoning elements, not towards final causes, the greatness and littleness of man, his far-reaching aims, his short duration, the curtain hung over his futurity, the disappointments of life, the defeat of good, the success of evil, physical pain, mental anguish, the prevalence and intensity of sin, the pervading idolatries, the corruptions, the dreary hopeless irreligion, that condition of the whole race so fearfully yet exactly described in the Apostle's words: "having no hope and without God in the world"—all this is a vision to dizzy and appal, and inflicts upon the mind the sense of a profound mystery which is absolutely beyond human solution.

We do not recommend such paragraphs. But when a good writer like Cardinal Newman uses one, it is instructive to examine his punctuation.

a. *How many different punctuation marks does Newman use?*

b. *How does he organize for the reader the subsections which precede the dash?*

c. *How would substituting commas for the semicolons affect the reader's ability to understand the passage?*

d. *What is the function of the colon? Of the dash?*

e. *Newman was a great religious thinker and a famous preacher. The passage above is from his spiritual autobiography. Does it reflect in any way his long training as a preacher? If so, what is the effect on the structure of his sentence and on its punctuation?*

* John Henry Newman, *Apologia pro Vita Sua*, 1864 (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1908), p. 241.

Materials for Revision

The following items contain examples of certain errors discussed in this chapter. Revising them will reinforce your understanding of the problems involved and your ability to recognize similar mistakes and to avoid making them in your own writing. The items have been arranged in groups, each of which represents a specific type of error.

A

1. As this revealed difficulties, several of the numerous problems were assigned to the Research Department. These included the effects of impurities in the raw materials, analytical methods for raw material control, and methods for product evaluation.
2. Sales for January dropped 3 percent below expectations as the Road Construction and Bridge divisions both failed to meet the month's goals.
3. Sales of the newer products have also been disappointing and in October were in total $150,000 less than planned for.
4. The demonstration was presented to approximately 40 interested persons representing the three major manufacturers of antibiotics, namely Crown, Brumpf, and Gordon laboratories.
5. Presented below for your consideration is an idea believed to have great economic potential. This idea is proper application of aptation to the coal hydrogenation process.
6. The types of communication between engineers can be divided into three general categories for simplification, speaking, writing, and reading.
7. This sample was prepared by Jones and the writer to contain 9.0% binder; sample 1 represents a portion of Priam Mix manufactured by Jones on May 17 to contain 9.0% binder; sample 2 was prepared in the laboratory with the Jones aggregate and made to contain 9.0% binder.

B

1. They do make a good product that you can count on.
2. Automobiles, which are lavender, are hard to sell.
3. We should certainly plan on making a profit which we could hardly do without.
4. As I mentioned before this school was a four-week school.
5. Experienced sales personnel who are hard to find should be paid premium salaries.
6. We have obtained varying melting points here at Merrivale which seem high if air currents are present, and low if a shield is placed before the oven, or if air currents are absent from the laboratory.

7. Although he has three brothers, his brother, John, is the only one who sought employment here.
8. Please forward this item to New York City where our Complaint Department will take care of it.
9. As you will note, there is only one retirement in this survey which was a typewriter handled under the blanket exchange in 1954.
10. John F. S. Drew Sales Manager for Pulham and Company will arrive by plane today.

C

1. The planned increase in the work force is 40 per month, however, many problems arise in securing trained personnel, and we doubt that over 30 per month will be hired.
2. The square-foot surface in each stove is approximately 7600, consequently our price for blasting bare surface is $.435 per square foot.
3. The men who are employed in this work have been working at it for well over ten years, nevertheless we discussed the safety procedures on a few points.
4. It will be necessary for these orders to be submitted by April 30, therefore, please notify us as early as possible if you will not be able to obtain orders covering this material.
5. I presume that you would like Mr. Frank or Mr. Roberts to go in and give Mr. Owen this information, however, I would be more than happy to do anything that I can to aid the cause.
6. Since this item was manufactured by only one company in California, its availability in the East was limited, thus use of the item has been practically discontinued by bulk users.

D

1. In this school we were told that the company produces some 750 different products, this I found very interesting.
2. The product pattern from this plant has changed requiring the installation of the column and allied equipment and space availability is such the congestion cannot be avoided.
3. Please order: 200 reams of mimeograph paper, 20 boxes of stencils, and 10 gallons of fluid, 120 reams of stationery, 20 boxes of carbon paper, and 2000 envelopes, 15 typewriter ribbons, 10 desk blotters, and 2 pairs of scissors.
4. The number of issues per year varies with the number of new products

introduced, as many as 4 issues of "Development News" have been produced in one month.

5. Please pass on the following information: when we call in periodically, as is now planned, we will report temperatures, when we discover the fault, probably during the peak load period, we will ask for a reading on the meters and a time check and if we have to remove the shaft and examine the socket, we will ask for an immediate shutting down of power.
6. To further confuse the matter, the customer should not have received a copy of debit memo 637/63, perhaps it wasn't marked "office copy only."

E

1. I can report the good news, and I feel that it is very good, that Johnson and company will announce its acceptance tomorrow morning.
2. I need only tell you the following—that T. C. Williams and Sons is after the same contract, that the longer we wait the higher our costs will be, and that Johnson would prefer to deal with us.
3. Short of taking a loss on the job—we will do everything we can to remain competitive.
4. We cannot release our stock into the current market, a market already badly depressed.
5. Johns will arrive on Tuesday—I will arrive on Wednesday—and Green will arrive on Saturday.
6. The manufacturer, the wholesaler, the retailer, the consumer, none of these wants a price increase.

F

1. There were three different types of speaking that I noticed. The conference type where the engineer is speaking on his own level, another type would be when he is speaking to a mixed group. The third type of speaking would be to people that don't understand the engineer's language.
2. The informal speaking being in the form of discussion with other engineers and the formal speaking being at section seminars and customer meetings.
3. A continuous 20 GPM system that will provide high shear and adequate flow will consist of at least two units in series. Each will be as follows: . . .
4. In these tests two types of specimens were used; one, a film of Pliabond 0.7 plus or minus 0.05 mm. (0.028 in.) in thickness on a 1 inch × 4 inch steel strip 0.3 mm. (0.012 in.) thick to simulate normal Pliabond application between plastic plies and two, a specimen of Pliabond of similar size but ¼ inch thick and without the metal backing in an attempt to exaggerate

any difference and also to be somewhat comparable to a heavy pouring in use.

5. So far I have had two weeks of "Operation Orientation" a sort of basic training for the company, for I found out how *we* (notice I said we, for I think I will buy stock) are organized, the different divisions, and so forth. The next step was a four-week methods school, and the best thing that I can say about that is that it sure was a thorough job, for I found out things that I never knew about the company, in fact I found out that your outfit is one of our best customers, so don't worry we here won't let you down, in fact we'll do all your researching for you, but all kidding aside the methods school was a pretty good example of what we make, and how we sell it to our customers, the only trouble was the four weeks sitting here at the school, but after a two-week working assignment in Chicago which I wrote you about last week, I am back at the school for another two-week session, this time advertising school.
6. It is the Product Manager's request that the 17–54 gallon drums and 16–15 gallon pails of Pliafilm 74 be returned to the Manorfield plant as soon as possible.
7. By review of past reports, it is easy to note the terse language; direct to-the-point statements and the valid reasons for variances.

10. Ideas and Language

In order to communicate effectively we must understand the world in which we live and be able to deal with it realistically. The executive who insists that every memorandum he receives be shorter than one page is not being realistic. While it is certainly true that much writing in business and industry is needlessly wordy and that a significant proportion of memoranda could be cut by 30 percent or more, there is no justification for a rigid one-page-per-memorandum doctrine. It is easy enough, however, to see how a busy executive might come to adopt it:

Step 1 "Business writing is too wordy."
(Careful! Let's make it, "*Much* business writing is too wordy" or "*Too much* business writing is too wordy.")

Step 2 "This company's memos are too long."
(Well, "*Many* of this company's memos are too long.")

Step 3 "Memos can be written in one page."
("*Many* memos . . .")

Step 4 "Either memos ought to be kept to one page or they shouldn't be written."
(Nothing in between?)

Step 5 "A memo is a memo, not a report."
(No?)

Step 6 "I'm the boss!"
(No comment)

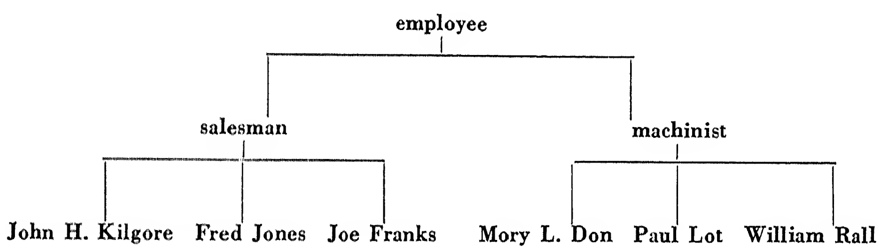
Step 7 "I won't read memos longer than one page."
(It's too late now. He's gone over the edge.)

The Abstraction Ladder

To understand the mistake that our executive is making, we will have to look carefully at certain characteristics of language. Some words are more specific than others. Or, to put it another way, some words are less abstract than others. If we refer to someone in the office as "John H. Kilgore," we are being quite specific. If we call him "a salesman" for the Wicker Company, we are being less specific. If we say that he is "an employee" of the company, we are being still less specific. We can arrange these words in a list which semanticists would call an abstraction ladder:

employee
salesman
John H. Kilgore

Salesman is more abstract than *John H. Kilgore* because there are a number of salesmen, of whom Kilgore is only one. Similarly, *employee* is more abstract than *salesman* because the Wicker Company has employees who are not salesmen. Adding these complexities to the ladder makes the concept a little clearer:

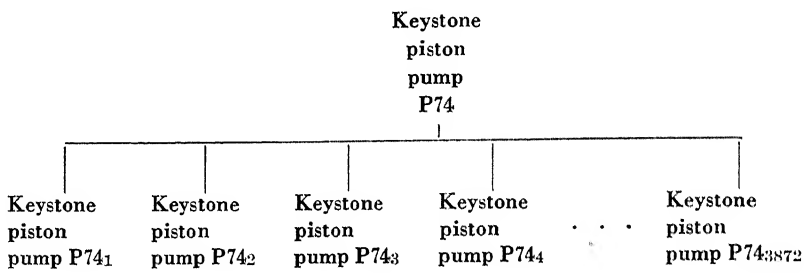


A complete picture, of course, would include, under *employee,* not only *salesman* and *machinist* but also *secretary, janitor, production engineer, vice president,* and all of the other categories into which the company's employees fall.

For identifying individual items (in this case, people) at the bottom of the abstraction ladder, semanticists usually refer to *salesman*$_1$, *salesman*$_2$, and *salesman*$_3$, instead of *John H. Kilgore, Fred Jones,* and *Joe Franks;* and *machinist*$_1$, *machinist*$_2$, and *machinist*$_3$ instead of *Mory L. Don, Paul Lot,* and *William Rall.* The subscripts point to the difference between the items at the same level on an abstraction ladder.

Here is another example. The Keystone Hydraulic Valve Company manufactures a piston pump which it designates as Keystone P74. We may

assume that within the range of certain specified tolerances all Keystone pumps bearing the model number P74 are "the same." Even at this level, however, we must recognize that we can be more specific. If *Keystone piston pump* $P74_1$ stands for an individual pump among 3872 which the company has manufactured, *Keystone piston pump* $P74_2$ for another, and so on, the concept of *Keystone piston pump P74* may be pictured in this way:



Stereotypes

Obvious as this may seem, it reminds us of an important point which in practice is frequently overlooked: of the 3872 P74 piston pumps that Keystone has manufactured, no two are *exactly* alike. They will be interchangeable in any hydraulic system, but when minutely examined, each will be found to be different in some detail. Thus $P74_1$ is not $P74_2$. Similarly, foreman_1 is not foreman_2, union leader_1 is not union leader_2 is not union leader_3, and customer_1 is not customer_2 is not customer_3 . . . is not customer_{273}.

What does all this have to do with the executive who demands a one-page memorandum? A careful examination of the abstraction ladder will indicate that the lower the level of abstraction, the more individual items there are to be concerned with. In quality control operations, Keystone will be concerned with many individual items in the series $P74_1$, $P74_2$, $P74_3$ . . . $P74_{3872}$. Conceivably, an effective summary by the Keystone Quality-control Department of their tests on P74 might take only half a page; but the statistics on which the summary was based (the results of tests of performance at different speeds, at different temperatures, under varying loads, with fluids of different viscosities . . .) might require another full page. If our executive wants only the summary, he can have his one-page memorandum. If he insists on the data as well, he is giving

the writer an impossible task. To comply, the writer will either have to omit half of the statistics or dispense with the analysis. Or he will have to move higher on the abstraction ladder—to be more general—so that, dealing with fewer details, he will be able to "cover" more ground in less space. In either case, the executive forces Quality Control to give him a distorted or incomplete picture: his edict in effect rules out the details which he really needs if he is to comprehend the results of the test.*

A memorandum by an engineer in the Jones Hydraulic Company, who for comparison is running the same number of tests on only two pumps, a Keystone piston pump P74 and a Rider piston pump 2, will probably be much shorter than the one we have been discussing. The obvious moral for our executive with the one-page fixation, then, is that memorandum$_1$ is not memorandum$_2$ is not memorandum$_3$. Each memorandum must be different if it is to do its job satisfactorily.†

Unfortunately, many businessmen who understand that interchangeable parts are not identical act as if all memoranda, letters, employees, and customers were identical. As a result, they run into serious difficulty. John Fox, sales manager for the Williams Biscuit Company, has trouble with a customer in South America, who is unreasonable. Instead of realizing that South American customer$_1$ is not South American customer$_2$, he thereafter acts as if *all* South American customers were unreasonable and sends curt letters in answer to inquiries from that part of the world. As a result, his competitor's sales in South America boom while his own decrease. Or take Frank Williams, just out of college. He has trouble getting along with the works superintendent on his first job. Instead of realizing that superintendent$_1$ is not superintendent$_2$, he reacts much as our executive did with his memoranda and decides that "works superintendents are rough to get along with." As a result, for the rest of his life he may communicate inadequately with works superintendents. Though these examples may seem exaggerated, such psychological blocks are more common than most people realize. They almost always cause communication problems.

Students of language use small numbers as subscripts to warn us about

* In this particular situation, the writer can use sleight-of-hand to solve his problem: he can write the summary as a one-page memorandum and relegate the statistics to a second sheet entitled "Appendix." We will discuss this matter further in Chapter 12 on reports. Unfortunately, not all such problems lend themselves to this solution.

† The abstraction ladders that we have used are very simple. For one which shows the relationship between a greater number of concepts, see the Illustrative Materials at the end of this chapter, page 212.

other dangers in the communication process. They might be used, for example, in the case of Francis Faren, president of a medium-sized paper-box company. In 1933 the employees of his plant went out on strike for four months and almost put him out of business. He had to hire special policemen to guard his property and was himself stoned on several occasions as he entered the plant. Ever since he has had no use for union officers or members. His private statements about unions are always caustic. His letters to the union, which eventually won the right to represent his workers, are always offensive. And he continues to have labor trouble: he does not realize that union_{1959} is not union_{1933}. Times change, people change, and unions change.

Or take Fred Parker, who walked on the picket line outside Francis Faren's plant in 1933. One day he resisted a special policeman who thought he was walking too close to the gate, and the policeman struck him. Ever since he has said repeatedly, "Employers are lousy so-and-so's." He views any communication from management with suspicion. He is always sure that his supervisor "has it in for him." If his attitude makes it difficult for him to keep a job, he will eventually conclude that he has been blacklisted. All because he does not understand that employer_1 is not employer_2; employer_{1959} is not employer_{1933}.

The Francis Farens and the Fred Parkers cause many of the communications problems in business today. Even if they recognize that a particular individual does not fit the stereotype that they have set up, they still continue to use the stereotype. When asked about the individual, they will say "He's different." When asked about the group, they will continue to reiterate their stereotyped ideas. In the end the man who thinks too often in stereotypes may become so embittered that he is suspicious of everyone and may lose the ability to communicate adequately with anyone. Such extreme cases are unusual. But we all know people like Francis Faren and Fred Parker.

In thinking, writing, and speaking, therefore, we must be careful of the implied *all, always,* or *never.* Not "Business writing is too wordy," which implies that all business writing is too wordy, but "*Much* (or *too much*) business writing is too wordy." Not "(*All*) Memos are too long," but "*Many* memos are too long." Not "*No* memo should be longer than one page," but "*This* memo should have been no longer than one page." Not, after one failure, "Keystone piston pumps P74 are no good," but "*That* Keystone piston pump P74 was no good." (Of course, if *successive* P74 pumps fail to perform, one may justifiably conclude that they are no good.)

Not "Unions can never be trusted," but "*In 1933,* the union struck my plant for five months." Not "Employers are no good," but "*In 1933* my head was bloodied on a picket line."

South American customer$_1$ is not South American customer$_2$. In fact South American customer$_{1\text{-}1959}$ may not be South American customer$_{1\text{-}1940}$. During the war, he may have learned a lot about our business procedures and changed his method of doing business with North American suppliers.

Writers and readers, speakers and listeners should be aware of these barriers to communication. They can occur at either end of the telephone line. They can be caused by the man who receives a letter or an order as well as by the man who dictates it. They can be caused by the man who designs a pump, by a worker, by a union leader, or by a customer. They can also be caused by government officials at all levels, by lawyers, by doctors—in short, by people in every area and in every walk of life.

Abstractions

The abstraction ladder is a useful device for examining other communication problems. A report, for example, may begin: "The aircraft hydraulic systems that this report will cover can be defined as systems for the transmission of power by means of fluid under pressure." This is a valid definition. The validity of a statement, however, does not guarantee that it will communicate.

Although this definition may be entirely clear for an engineer, it will not be very useful for an executive who has had no experience with hydraulic systems. A look at the abstraction ladder will indicate why it will prove difficult for the layman. The phrases in the defining portion of the sentence—"systems," "transmission of power," "fluid under pressure"—are all at a higher level of abstraction than the phrase they are defining. "Systems" is several steps higher on the ladder than "aircraft hydraulic systems." Furthermore, although "fluid under pressure" is not nearly as abstract as "systems," it is still not as low on the ladder as "piston pump," "unloading valve," or "relief valve." The engineer who wrote this particular report recognized that by itself the statement would be difficult for the audience for which it was intended, so he added a second sentence:

> **Such systems must include at least three sections: the power section, including a pump for translating mechanical energy into fluid under**

> **pressure, and pressure-regulating devices; transmission lines to carry the fluid under pressure from one place to another; and a cylinder or cylinders to transform the moving fluid under pressure back into mechanical power.**

The phrases after the colon are well down the abstraction ladder. They are specific enough so that the businessman for whom the report is intended gets an over-all view of the system, but not so specific as to swamp him with more details than he can handle. The first sentence, which moves *up* the abstraction ladder, is probably a little too general for the businessman, too vague to grasp, too technical to "see." The second sentence, which comes *down* the abstraction ladder in order to explain, provides enough concrete detail for him to understand not only what an aircraft hydraulic system is, but also what it is composed of and a little of how it works.

The same problem appears in other forms. Some time ago a large company asked us to work with the contributors to a periodic progress report. The president and board of directors used the report as a prime source of information for making decisions. It was important, therefore, that the report contain a concise picture of all significant developments in the company's current operations. When the president explained his dissatisfaction with the report, he singled out one recurrent problem as being particularly frustrating. "Take this sentence," he said. "It sounds as if they're telling us something, but they aren't really. The sentence doesn't say a thing." And he read:

> **Our success with the first three items was considerably below expectations because sales for these products dropped sharply during the report period.**

"It doesn't say a thing," he repeated. The president was absolutely right. The sentence pretended to give an explanation, but really did not. The difficulty was that the so-called explanation (". . . because sales for these products dropped sharply . . .") did not go far enough down the abstraction ladder to tell the president what specific factors—buyer resistance in Southern cities, a drought in Nebraska, and so on—caused the drop in sales.

An explanation must not simply slide over to other words at the same level of abstraction:

> **"We are having a recession."**
> **"What do you mean, specifically, by a recession?"**
> **"Well, a recession is a mild depression."**

"What, exactly, is a mild depression?"
"A mild depression? Why, that is a temporary economic setback."
"And what is that?"
"That is a slump. You know what a slump is."
"No."
"A slump is a recession."

Ring around a rosie!

Many of the contributors to the progress report did go down the ladder when they offered explanations. Here is a sentence that told the president something:

> The unexpectedly large sales volume for the year was brought about by a 15-percent increase in sales over last year to upholstery manufacturers as a result of a similar increase in automobile production, by the purchase of two tanker loads by an English customer, by unscheduled sales to a strikebound competitor, and by generally excellent business conditions.

This statement requires more words than the other. But it says something. Furthermore, three of the four reasons that it gives for the "unexpectedly large sales volume" are facts rather than inferences. The writer does not say, "Upholsterers had a good year" or "Automobile manufacturers did unusually well." He speaks of "*a 15-percent increase* in sales . . . to upholstery manufacturers" and "*a 15-percent increase* in automobile production." He does not write about "improved foreign sales"; he specifies "two tanker loads" to an English customer. He does not draw any conclusions about the strikebound competitor; he simply says that the sales were unscheduled—that is, they had not been anticipated when the company planned production for the year. He does speak of "generally excellent business conditions." This statement is an inference, but one based on general knowledge, which he feels no need to support.

Facts and Inferences

What is a fact? A fact may be defined as a verifiable report based on sense impressions: what can be seen, heard, felt, tasted, or smelled.

A ball is round.
Jack struck Tom.

We can verify the first statement by examining a number of balls. The second statement is also verifiable because it can or could have been verified by observers at the scene. Statements which go beyond the facts that our senses report, conclusions which are based on facts, we call inferences. Naturally, we must draw inferences. If on May 1 a manufacturer places an order for May 27 delivery, he has inferred that his company will be in existence on May 27, that his supplier will be in existence on May 27, and that the means of transporting the purchase from the supplier to his plant will be in existence on May 27. Businessmen cannot operate without making thousands upon thousands of such inferences every minute. Similarly, a purchasing agent must decide on the basis of a great number of factors that either "This is a good time to buy" or "This is not a good time to buy."

Why, then, distinguish between facts and inferences? First, in certain situations facts are preferable to inferences; and second, a good many problems in communication arise when people do not recognize the difference between the two and react to them in exactly the same way.

Let us return to our Quality Control Department checking on selector valves as they come off the assembly line. When the head of that department asked for the results of the tests during the last two months, he wanted facts:

Number tested		217
Number which met specifications		200
Number which failed to meet specifications:		
More than allowable leakage around sleeve	7	
Cracked casting	5	
Stripped threads on intake	5	
		17

What if the man doing the testing had merely supplied what he felt to be the conclusion warranted by these facts rather than the facts themselves (in other words, an inference): "Standards of production are at an acceptable level"? What if, unknown to him, management had recently installed several new machines guaranteed to reduce rejects to 3 percent or less? Buried under his own heavy work load, the department head might well glance at the conclusion, assume that his engineers knew all about the new machines, and simply report upstairs that the new machines were a success. If the man doing the testing had reported the facts, the department head would have sounded an alarm which would have started a very neces-

sary investigation. On the other hand, his making an improper inference might cause a delay of months in discovering the failure of the new machines.

Even when only an inference is called for, it is sometimes wise to include the facts on which it is based. A vice president for purchasing wrote to one of his subordinates:

> Bolden at our Waterbury plant wants to know whether he can count on getting the carbon he needs from Jones & Mulhouse. Can we tell him that we'll have it for him?

Instead of replying with a bare yes or no, the purchasing agent answers:

> We'll have to take a calculated risk. Bill Brand, J & M's assistant sales manager, is asking two cents higher than we can afford to go. However, Jim Wrait, the sales manager, is due back from Venezuela on the 27th, in time for us to discuss the matter with him and still get the carbon to Waterbury when they need it.
>
> Jim has told me several times that during the off season he will cut prices by two cents if we buy in quantity. I have heard, also, that J & M's warehouses are loaded. I think it's a pretty good gamble.

The reply is relatively short. Its virtue is that it lays out the facts on which the agent drew in making his inference: Wrait's return on the 27th, his past statements, the full warehouses at J & M. The vice president knows exactly where he stands and can review the possibilities himself: Wrait may be delayed in Venezuela; a new J & M policy ruling out price cuts may make it impossible for him to live up to his promise; off season or not, the carbon may already be committed; the agent's informant may have been mistaken about the amount of carbon in the J & M warehouses. Whatever decision he makes, he can make intelligently. He cannot storm into the agent's office the next week with "Why the devil didn't you tell me that Wrait was in Venezuela? I wouldn't have told Waterbury to go ahead if I'd known that you'd been having trouble with Brand."

Before a person writes a letter, a memorandum, or a report, he should carefully separate in his own mind facts from inferences. When he writes, he should do the same for his reader. Above all, he should label his inferences. Notice that the first sentence of the agent's reply to the vice president is a warning that he is going to draw an inference. He then lists his facts. When he reaches his inference, he signals it with an "I think" and reinforces the signal with the word "gamble." Notice, too, that he has not attempted to avoid making a decision, to fill his reply with "weasel" words. His boss has

asked him to crawl out on a limb, and he has done so. The very nature of business today makes limb-crawling a standard procedure. In many instances, however, it helps if both writer and reader are aware of the risk. The writer at least should always know when he is out on a limb.

The Dangers of Either/Or

Let us return to our one-page-per-memo executive. He has demonstrated other semantic confusions that we should examine. "Memos ought either to be kept down to one page or they shouldn't be written." "Either . . . or," he said. We hear such statements often. "Either you're on our side or theirs"; "it's either black or white"; "either I'm right or I'm wrong." But such statements do not really reflect the world in which we live—or the world in which we would like to live. Why must a person be in one belligerent camp or another? Isn't he dealing with shades of gray more often than with black or white? Common sense tells us that in most instances people are partly right and partly wrong. Yet some people insist on forcing situations into an either/or, black/white pattern. As a result, the ideas they communicate are distorted into a similar pattern.

Black and white, hot and cold, up and down, good and bad, right and wrong do exist in the world, but they exist as polar extremities of a continuum rather than as banks on either side of an unbridgeable chasm. We recognize this point of view on rating scales when we evaluate:

Good				**Bad**
A	***B***	***C***	***D***	***F***

Excellent		**Average**		**Poor**
	Good		**Weak**	

When it comes to action, however, usually we must either do something or not do it. A personnel manager, for instance, must decide to hire or not to hire certain graduating seniors. His *reasons* for hiring or not hiring them, however, are seldom black or white. Instead he must generally choose from among several applicants, none of whom will be "perfect" for the job. He does not set up rigid, ideal standards and reject every applicant who fails to meet them. If he did, he would never hire anyone. To insist

that every applicant fit a mold is no more realistic than to insist that every memorandum be held to one page.

Definitions

Our one-page-per-memorandum executive raises another problem when he insists that "A memo is a memo, not a report." With that statement he opens up the whole question of definition. He needs to be reminded that "memo" is, after all, only a word. When one asks what a "memo" *is,* therefore, he is really asking about how people use the word. Repeating "A memo is a memo" may reinforce his own prejudice about the proper length of a memo, but he is only fooling himself if he thinks that he is proving anything.

How can "memo" be defined? We can pick up a handful of papers which we call memos and say, "These are memos." In speaking, we occasionally use this pointing method. We may even be able to resort to a kind of pointing when we write: "For a picture of a grunion, see Plate IV, page 312." More often, however, we resort to a so-called "logical" or "verbal" definition, the kind found in the dictionary. Thus, *Webster's New World Dictionary* reports that people use the word "memo" as the equivalent of "an informal written communication, as from one department to another in a business office."

Logical Definitions

A logical definition is a group of words which indicates the class to which a word belongs and how it differs from other items in that same class.

TERM	CLASS	DIFFERENTIATORS
definition	a statement	of what a word or group of words means
logical definition	a group of words	that indicates the class to which a word belongs and how it differs from other items in the same class

TERM	CLASS	DIFFERENTIATORS
memorandum	a communication	which is informal and written
hydraulic system	a system for the transmission of power	by means of fluid under pressure
lock	a mechanical device	which, by means of a spring or bolt operated by a key or combination, holds a door or lid closed

Of course, there is no "correct" definition of any word. A definition is a device for identification, and the "best" definition is the one which is most useful to indicate how a word should be used in a particular context. A tax expert might begin a definition of a company, "A company is a corporate entity which . . ."; but a human relations expert might begin his definition, "A company is a group of individuals who . . ."

Operational Definitions

Another kind of definition is the so-called "operational" definition. Often it is not very elegantly expressed, but it can communicate. The little boy who says "Punishment is when you get sent to bed without supper" has given an operational definition. *Webster's New World Dictionary* defines "saturated solution" as "a solution in equilibrium at a definite temperature with the undissolved solute; solution containing so much dissolved at a given temperature." An operational definition of the same term might be: "Fill a glass with water to within an inch of the top and pour salt into it slowly, stirring as you pour. When you can dissolve no more salt in the water, as indicated by the salt beginning to collect on the bottom of the glass, you have a saturated solution." An operational definition describes a term by its method of working or functioning—that is, through its *action.*

Scientists and engineers often use operational definitions rather than logical definitions when they are concerned with how something works or acts or with how to make something. By moving directly to the operational definition, they save themselves the trouble of setting up a logical definition. In this way they often eliminate, also, wrangling about the clarity or the

validity of a logical definition. Another important advantage of the operational definition is that it forces the definer to come down the abstraction ladder, which always aids communication. Since the sciences have used this type of definition so widely, more and more laymen have come to use it too. It is particularly effective when a specialist is writing to a nonspecialist: accountant to store manager; specification writer to installation man; economist to sales manager; science writer to layman.

Definition requires classification, on which ultimately all learning and all communication depend. But a rigid insistence that all the units in a particular class are identical can cause trouble: memo_1 is not memo_2 is not memo_3; report_1 is not report_2 is not report_3. Perhaps memo_1 is report_3. Whether it is or not can be determined only by looking at how each term is used to see if there is an area of overlapping.

Illustrative Materials

1

The best-known works of Lewis Carroll were ostensibly written for children, and children have been delighted by them for nearly a hundred years. But they have also been a delight to adults because beneath the fun and the fantasy are penetrating commentaries on the fundamental dilemmas in which society finds itself. Among these dilemmas is man's frequent difficulty in keeping clear the relationship between language and ideas. The problem is raised in Alice's discussion with Humpty Dumpty in **Through the Looking Glass:**

"This conversation is going on a little too fast: let's go back to the last remark but one."

"I'm afraid I can't quite remember it," Alice said, very politely.

"In that case we start afresh," said Humpty Dumpty, "and it's my turn to choose a subject—" ("He talks about it just as if it was a game!" thought Alice.) "So here's a question for you. How old did you say you were?"

Alice made a short calculation, and said "Seven years and six months."

"Wrong!" Humpty Dumpty exclaimed triumphantly. "You never said a word like it!"

"I thought you meant 'How old *are* you?' " Alice explained.

"If I'd meant that, I'd have said it," said Humpty Dumpty.

Alice didn't want to begin another argument, so she said nothing.

"Seven years and six months!" Humpty Dumpty repeated thoughtfully. "An uncomfortable sort of age. Now if you'd asked *my* advice, I'd have said 'Leave off at seven'—but it's too late now."

"I never ask advice about growing," Alice said indignantly.

"Too proud?" the other inquired.

Alice felt even more indignant at this suggestion. "I mean," she said, "that one can't help growing older."

"*One* can't, perhaps," said Humpty Dumpty; "but *two* can. With proper assistance, you might have left off at seven."

"What a beautiful belt you've got on!" Alice suddenly remarked. (They had had quite enough of the subject of age, she thought: and, if they really were to take turns in choosing subjects, it was *her* turn now.) "At least," she corrected herself on second thoughts, "a beautiful cravat, I should have said—no, a belt, I mean—I beg your pardon!" she added in dismay, for Humpty Dumpty looked thoroughly offended, and she began to wish she hadn't chosen that subject. "If only I knew," she thought to herself, "which was neck and which was waist!"

Evidently Humpty Dumpty was very angry, though he said nothing for a minute or two. When he *did* speak again, it was in a deep growl.

"It is a—*most*—*provoking*—thing," he said at last, "when a person doesn't know a cravat from a belt!"

"I know it's very ignorant of me," Alice said, in so humble a tone that Humpty Dumpty relented.

"It's a cravat, child, and a beautiful one, as you say. It's a present from the White King and Queen. There now!"

"Is it really?" said Alice, quite pleased to find that she *had* chosen a good subject after all.

"They gave it me," Humpty Dumpty continued thoughtfully as he crossed one knee over the other and clasped his hands round it, "they gave it me—for an un-birthday present."

"I beg your pardon?" Alice said with a puzzled air.

"I'm not offended," said Humpty Dumpty.

"I mean, what *is* an un-birthday present?"

"A present given when it isn't your birthday, of course."

Alice considered a little. "I like birthday presents best," she said at last.

"You don't know what you're talking about!" cried Humpty Dumpty. "How many days are there in a year?"

"Three hundred and sixty-five," said Alice.

"And how many birthdays have you?"

"One."

"And if you take one from three hundred and sixty-five what remains?"

"Three hundred and sixty-four, of course."

Humpty Dumpty looked doubtful. "I'd rather see that done on paper," he said.

Alice couldn't help smiling as she took out her memorandum-book, and worked the sum for him:

$$\begin{array}{r} 365 \\ 1 \\ \hline 364 \end{array}$$

Humpty Dumpty took the book and looked at it carefully. "That seems to be done right—" he began.

"You're holding it upside down!" Alice interrupted.

"To be sure I was!" Humpty Dumpty said gaily as she turned it round for him. "I thought it looked a little queer. As I was saying, that *seems* to be done right—though I haven't time to look it over thoroughly just now—and that shows that there are three hundred and sixty-four days when you might get un-birthday presents—"

"Certainly," said Alice.

"And only *one* for birthday presents, you know. There's glory for you!"

"I don't know what you mean by 'glory,' " Alice said.

Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. "Of course you don't—till I tell you. I meant 'there's a nice knock-down argument for you!' "

"But 'glory' doesn't mean 'a nice knock-down argument,' " Alice objected.

"When *I* use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less."

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you *can* make words mean so many different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master—that's all."

Alice was too much puzzled to say anything; so after a minute Humpty Dumpty began again. "They've a temper, some of them—particularly verbs: they're the proudest—adjectives you can do anything with, but not verbs—however, *I* can manage the whole lot of them! Impenetrability! That's what *I* say!"

"Would you tell me please," said Alice, "what that means?"

"Now you talk like a reasonable child," said Humpty Dumpty, looking very much pleased. "I meant by 'impenetrability' that we've had enough of that subject, and it would be just as well if you'd mention what you mean to do next, as I suppose you don't mean to stop here all the rest of your life."

"That's a great deal to make one word mean," Alice said in a thoughtful tone.

"When I make a word do a lot of work like that," said Humpty Dumpty, "I always pay it extra."

"Oh!" said Alice. She was too much puzzled to make any other remark.

"Ah, you should see 'em come round me of a Saturday night," Humpty Dumpty went on, wagging his head gravely from side to side, "for to get their wages, you know."

(Alice didn't venture to ask what he paid them with; and so you see I can't tell *you.*)

2

The language one chooses should reflect the idea he wants to express. The following passage should suggest how important it is to be aware not only of the denotation *of words, their literal meaning, but also of their* connotation, *the overtones they suggest.**

Many years ago, the Shah of Persia made a goodwill visit to England. He was given a tremendous ovation upon his arrival at Victoria Station in London.

As the Royal Carriage drove him through the streets, during the ride to Buckingham Palace, the people waved and cheered from the curbs.

Suddenly, among the crowd, he saw a small boy perched high on a lamp post, thumbing his nose at the carriage. His curiosity aroused, the Shah asked his interpreter what the gesture meant.

Blushing with embarrassment, the quick-thinking official replied, "Your Highness, it is an ancient custom of ours signifying profound respect."

* From *Tremendous Trifles,* Vol. 3, No. 7, Copyright 1958—a monthly publication sent to clients and prospects by Vic Maitland and Associates, Pittsburgh advertising agency.

Following his visit, highly satisfied with the feelings of friendship that had developed during his stay, the Shah prepared to return to Persia.

Again, vast cheering crowds turned out at Victoria Station to see him off. As the train began to move, the Shah stood on the rear platform, smiling and waving to the well-wishers.

As a final gesture of farewell, he ceremoniously lifted his arm and, with deepest sincerity, he thumbed his nose vigorously at all the well-wishers who had come to bid him goodbye.

There are many words and gestures, that, despite their apparent innocence, are capable of achieving exactly the opposite effect from that which is intended.

Several weeks ago, we saw a magazine advertisement for a vibrating cushion designed to relieve fatigue and nervous tension.

It called to mind a similar product introduced in Chicago in 1941. It was a vibrating mattress—a truly marvelous development.

The vibrations in this mattress were so faint as to be imperceptible. You could lie down on it and never know that it was any different from a conventional mattress.

Yet the vibrations were there. And they worked. Taut muscles relaxed. Tense nerves were soothed. The entire body was gently lulled into deep, peaceful, refreshing sleep.

The vibrating mattress was, or could have been, one of the greatest boons to sufferers of insomnia and industrial fatigue ever developed. Yet it never sold. Within two years, it was withdrawn from the market.

There were a number of reasons for the failure, most of them attributable to inept promotion. But the real deathblow came in a series of newspaper advertisements stressing the theme, "Shake yourself to sleep."

Well, people wanted sleep. It was precisely what they needed. The problem was, they were already too shook up to go to sleep. One word, "shake," spelled the finish of a basically sound and worthwhile product.

Practically everybody, sometime in their lives, has been guilty of an unconscious *faux pas*. A remark intended as a compliment turns out to be an insult. Or a gesture intended as a good deed is distorted into something evil and grasping—all by an incredible mix-up of words and actions.

In the business world, these subtle twists of fate can be more than merely embarrassing. Often, they can be downright disastrous, both to the individuals and the company involved.

How are the language problems of the Shah of Persia and the manufacturer of the vibrating mattress related to those presented by Lewis Carroll's Humpty Dumpty?

3

Before you read this news item, ask yourself two questions: What does national *mean? How many days are there in a week?*

PICKLE PICNICS PLUGGED

Pickle packers presume the public prefers pickles on picnics. What's more, the National Pickle Packers Association convinced Governor Ernest McFarland.

He proclaimed a ten-day National Pickle Week in Arizona urging Arizonans to picnic with pickles and to pick up litter at picnics.

a. *Why did the governor proclaim "National Pickle Week in Arizona" instead of "Arizona Pickle Week"?*
b. *Why did he use the word* week?

4

Read carefully these paragraphs, the first three of a speech by the mayor of Elmwood, somewhere in the United States. It was delivered in the midst of his campaign for election to a second term.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, my opponent has been weeping and wailing about the sad state of the city under the present administration. But what are the facts, ladies and gentlemen? What are the facts?

The first and most important fact is that under my direction every officer of your city government has been dedicated and will continue to be dedicated to the well-being of all our people. They are the finest group of hard-working, God-fearing, 100-percent American men and women that any city could ask for. And you can bet your bottom dollar that when next

January rolls around they'll still be seeing to it that every citizen of this community gets a decent break.

Now, the second fact. My opponent says the police department is corrupt. What nonsense! From the patrolman who walks each night down your streets, ever alert to apprehend the vicious criminal who would steal your property or assault your person, to the superintendent himself, every man on the force has but one thought in mind: the protection of the innocent and the apprehension of the guilty. Who is it that calls in question the loyalty of these dedicated men who must brave danger and the gunman's bullet, who must plunge into icy waters to save the life of a little girl (was it *your* daughter?), and who must keep up a relentless pursuit of evil-doing in every form? Who calls their loyalty in question? Here on this very stage, not six months ago, I was privileged to award our highest decoration to that wonderful man, Sgt. Thomas Allison, the hero of the Club 56 fire, who saved the lives of countless citizens of this city by his daring. When they tell you about the Police Department, confront them with the real fact. Point with pride to Sgt. Allison and tell the rascals: "There is the Elmwood Police Department!"

The mayor has told his constituents that he will give them "the facts" about the operation of the city government under his administration.

a. *List the specific facts which he presents.*

b. *What else does he include in his speech?*

c. *Does he illustrate any of the errors in handling ideas which have been discussed in this chapter? Which ones?*

d. *On the basis of this section of his speech, would you be inclined to vote for him? Would "the average voter" be impressed?*

5

As with any other kind of communication, the form of a definition depends upon its function. The following definitions were issued by the National Electrical Manufacturers Association:

MG1–1.20 Open Machine

An open machine is one having ventilated openings which permit passage of external cooling air over and around the windings of the machine.

MG1–1.21 Totally Enclosed Machine

A totally-enclosed machine is one so enclosed as to prevent the free exchange of air between the inside and the outside of the case but not sufficiently enclosed to be termed air-tight.*

Many associations have committees to write such definitions.
a. *Why do associations concern themselves with definitions?*
b. *Why can't they be written by one person rather than by committees?*
c. *In each definition, what is the class?*
d. *What are the differentiators?*

6

Here is another definition in the same form:

Statistics [is] the science which deals with the collection, classification, and use of numerical facts or data, bearing on a subject or matter.†

Compare it with the following definition written by a mathematician for the scientists in a research laboratory.

What is Statistics? To us, statistics is the science of making inferences from experimental data. The obstacles which it must overcome, of course, are (*a*) experimental error, in the usual sense of measurement errors and in homogeneity of materials, etc., and (*b*) the fact that any experimental results are a finite sample supposedly "representative" of a larger population of expected results.

There is a common misconception that "statistics" is useful only when large masses of data are available. This idea is almost the exact opposite of the truth. The smaller the sample, the greater is the need for efficiency in gathering the data and interpreting the results.

There is another misconception that "statistics" is merely the examination of data for the presence of various effects or trends. On the contrary, as we use more statistical sophistication in gathering data and planning

* NEMA Definitions of Enclosures and Temperature Ratings for Motors and Generators, March 1958.

† *The American College Dictionary*, edited by Clarence L. Barnhart (New York: Random House, 1956).

experiments, we need less in interpreting results, and obviously no amount of statistical cleverness can extract information from data when the data have been so collected that the desired information is not there.

Statistics, then, concerns itself with making inferences from data, and with planning the collection of data so that inferences can be made as efficiently as possible. Hence every experimenter must behave at times as a statistician, and a good experimenter knows some statistics, whether he calls it that or not.*

a. *Were the two definitions meant to serve the same purpose?*
b. *How did the use to which each was to be put govern its form?*
c. *Does the dictionary definition agree with the second sentence of the extended definition? Explain.*
d. *As a whole do the dictionary definition and the extended definition agree? Explain.*
e. *Should they agree? Explain.*

7

Here is still another approach to definition†:

It is easier to say what loyalty is not than to say what it is. It is not conformity. It is not passive acquiescence in the status quo. It is not preference for everything American over everything foreign. It is not an ostrich-like ignorance of other countries and other institutions. It is not the indulgence in ceremony—a flag salute, an oath of allegiance, a fervid verbal declaration. It is not a particular creed, a particular version of history, a particular body of economic practices, a particular philosophy.

It is a tradition, an ideal, and a principle. It is a willingness to subordinate every private advantage for the larger good. It is an appreciation of the rich and diverse contributions that can come from the most varied sources. It is allegiance to the traditions that have guided our greatest statesmen and inspired our most eloquent poets—the traditions of freedom, equality, democracy, tolerance, the tradition of the higher law, of experimentation, co-operation, and pluralism. It is realization that America was

* By Robert Hook, Research Laboratories, Westinghouse Electric Corporation.

† Henry Steele Commager, "Who Is Loyal to America," *Harper's Magazine*, September, 1947, p. 198.

born of revolt, flourished on dissent, became great through experimentation.

a. *How does it differ from the NEMA definitions? From the definitions of statistics?*
b. *Why does the author begin by telling what loyalty is not?*

The American College Dictionary *defines* loyalty *as:*

1. state or quality of being loyal; faithfulness to engagements or obligations.
2. faithful adherence to a sovereign or government, or to a leader, cause, or the like.

c. *Compare the adequacy of this definition with that of Commager's.*
d. *Would it be appropriate for a dictionary to include a definition of* loyalty *similar to Commager's? Explain the reasons for your decision.*
e. *Compare the adequacy of the dictionary definition of* loyalty *with the NEMA definitions above.*
f. *The NEMA definition of an open machine uses approximately the same number of words as the dictionary definition of* loyalty. *The NEMA definition, however, is more precise. How do you account for the difference?*

8

Most of us think that we know what the verb to offer means and that we could define it without the help of a dictionary. But even the dictionary definition is not always precise enough, as this news report indicates.

Puzzle: To Define the Verb "Offer"*

By John S. Tompkins

Twenty-five years after Congress passed the Securities Act of 1933, the federal courts are being asked to rule on what is meant by an "offer to sell" a security. The ruling promises to have profound effect on the investment banking business.

* *The New York Times,* Sunday, October 5, 1958, Section 3, p. 1.

The problem of what an "offering" is legally has troubled the Securities and Exchange Commission ever since it was established. The courts are now being brought into this picture as a result of injunctive proceedings brought by the SEC against a corporation and two underwriters for allegedly "offering" securities before they were registered . . .

Generally, Wall Street firms shy away from challenging the SEC in court. Most investment bankers have found it more prudent to take a rap on the knuckles from the SEC than to argue in court, even when they felt they were being treated unfairly. For time is an important factor in the marketing of securities and reputations are at stake. In this instance the commission's move in court has given the underwriters little choice but to fight the case to the end.

The case arose over the establishment of a new company called the Arvida Corporation, organized to hold much of the Florida real estate of Arthur Vining Davis, multimillionaire and former chairman of the Aluminum Corporation of America.

The information was given out at a press conference called by Carl M. Loeb, Rhoades & Co., an investment house. It was said that Loeb, Rhoades and Dominick & Dominick, another investment house, planned to underwrite a public offering of $25,000,000 to $30,000,000 of Arvida stock. In answer to a reporter's question it was said that the price would be $10 or $11 a share. The underwriters also said that a registration statement was being prepared.

Several days after publication of a news story about Arvida, the New York office of the SEC went into federal court for an injunction . . .

The commission and the defendants agree substantially on the facts; they differ on definitions. On motives, the SEC charges that the press conference was the beginning of a selling campaign, while the defendants say they held it to dispel unfounded rumors that Mr. Davis was liquidating his holdings.

The Securities Act prohibits the offering of securities before a registration statement has been filed and becomes effective, but does not spell out what the word "offer" means.

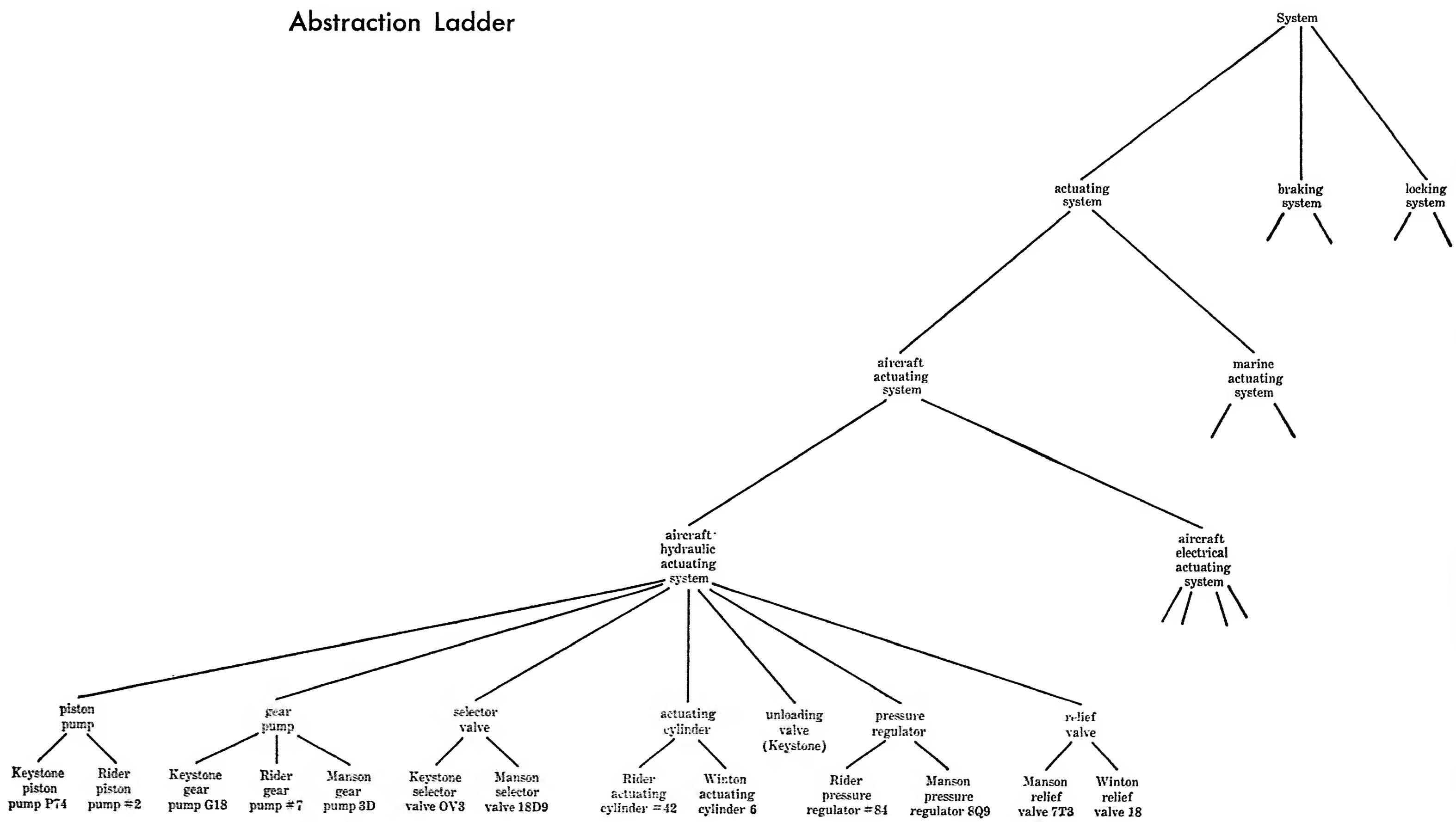
a. *What does* to offer *mean to you?*

b. *Compare your definition with a dictionary definition.*

c. *How could Securities and Exchange Commission enforce the law for twenty-five years without knowing precisely what it meant?*

d. *Why is the dictionary definition of no help in this situation?*

Abstraction Ladder



Exercises

1. Discuss the kind and amount of proof necessary to support the following statements when the implied "all" in each statement is replaced by "most"; by "many"; by "some."
   a. Politicians are shifty.
   b. Lawyers just can't write a simple sentence.
   c. Reports should be kept under a hundred pages.
2. Arrange the following words in order from the most concrete to least concrete (that is, from least abstract to most abstract) : cow, livestock, animal, investment.
3. Arrange the following words in a chart to show their degree of concreteness (that is, to show their degree of abstraction) : cow, livestock, pig, horse, animal, tractor, chicken, investment, duck, barn, fowl.
4. Arrange the following words so that they indicate increasing degrees of heat: cold, warm, boiling, freezing, hot.
5. Define the following terms:
   recession
   asset
   liability
   incompetent
6. Classify the following as facts or inferences (remember that you should not be concerned with whether a statement is true or false, but simply with whether it is verifiable by observation) :
   a. In the last shipment, we returned ten of the twenty motors from Ewing.
   b. John has two fingers missing on his left hand.
   c. Workers under twenty and over sixty are inefficient.
   d. John is incapacitated.
   e. Ewing motors are no good.
   f. The number of rejects from workers under twenty is twelve percent higher than from those between twenty and sixty.
   g. Frank Stevens was convicted of petty theft.
   h. John can't do the work.
   i. The union asked for a ten-cent an hour increase.
   j. Frank Stevens is a thief.
   k. The boss is a cheapskate.
   l. The number of rejects from workers over sixty is 10 percent higher than from those between twenty and sixty.
   m. The boss refused the union request for a ten-cent an hour increase.
   n. The union asked for too much money.
7. Rewrite the following sentences so that they supply specific reasons:
   a. The good results in the Metalwork Department resulted from work performed on special contracts.

b. This performance was due to better than expected demand since the start of the second quarter of this year.
c. The production of the first three fell considerably below the June target because sales for these products fell short of expectations.
d. Fuel oil sold to railroads was slightly lower in January due entirely to a reduction in the low volume of fuel oil sold by five plants during the month.
e. The overrun in aircraft ring sales this month was due in part to shipment on orders from Love & Partridge to replenish low inventories.

8. Summarize briefly a situation in which someone caused trouble by making an unwarranted assumption. Analyze the probable reasons for his having done so.
9. On the same evening, listen to two news reports on the radio. Describe briefly the way in which each reporter handled a particular news item. Then answer the following questions:
   a. What should one expect of a news *reporter?*
   b. What should one expect of a news *analyst?*
   c. In which category (reporter or analyst) would you place each of the men to whom you listened? Why?
10. Find an event which is treated both in a news story on the first page of your paper and in an editorial. After comparing the two, answer the following questions:
    a. What is the purpose of a news story?
    b. What is the purpose of an editorial?
    c. Do the news story and the editorial contain the same relative proportions of fact and inference? Supply evidence to support your contention.
    d. Would you expect a news story and an editorial to contain the same relative proportions of fact and inference? Explain your answer.
11. Find a news event which is treated on the first page of two different newspapers. After comparing the two, answer the following questions:
    a. Do the two news stories contain the same relative proportions of fact and inference? Supply evidence to support your contention.
    b. On the basis of this one comparison, would you say that one paper is more objective than the other? Explain your answer.

11. Preparation and Organization of Materials

Case Study: A Confirming Memo

Some years ago a small tanker owned by a chemical company was damaged in a collision in the Gulf of Mexico. The damage was not irreparable, but a considerable amount of sea water contaminated the cargo. The tanker headed for the nearest large port. Since the cargo was salvageable the company flew a young executive, Tom Morton, down to the port to make the necessary arrangements. He made a brief survey of the situation and then called his boss at the home office. After their conversation the boss sent another young man to help Tom. With him he sent a memorandum confirming the arrangements made over the telephone.

The memorandum might have taken any one of a number of different forms. Let us look at two possibilities. Here is the first:

> **This memorandum confirms the decisions which we made over the telephone today for handling the "Robert Slack" when she makes port this afternoon. We shall let you know as soon as arrangements have been completed for temporary storage and reclamation of the cargo at Anderson City.**
>
> **W. H. Johnson and Company is the outfit to handle the dis-**

charge of the cargo, and you will contact Mr. H. H. Branscome of the Norbet Company for an estimate of the total damage. Tom Pratt will arrange for temporary care of the ship when it arrives and you are authorized to hire a watchman if necessary.

We need to have Mr. Branscome's estimate for insurance purposes. Also you should get a bid from the Port Wells Iron Works on the emergency repairs. Please send figures on both promptly.

We also need a statement of expenses for salvaging the cargo. Arrange for this with W. H. Johnson and Company after you have siphoned off as much free water as possible using Tom Pratt's crew and send a statement of all salvage expenses to this office.

Please have a water-content analysis run on the sample sent to you by the Thomas Chemical Company. Also, after the free water has been removed, each compartment should be agitated and samples taken for water content analysis.

The cargo is to be shipped by tank car to Anderson City. We shall need your barge unloading report in triplicate and a copy of the documents to be turned over to you by Mr. E. T. Brainard. Results of the test should be sent to P. J. Krug in Chicago with a copy to this office.

As soon as we have checked with the insurance people we will give you authority to proceed with emergency repairs.

If you run across any other pertinent information, be sure to send it along too.

All of us up here appreciate your prompt and efficient handling of this emergency.

J. C. SMITH

Here is the second possibility:

This memorandum confirms the arrangements which we made over the telephone today for handling the "Robert Slack" when she makes port sometime this afternoon. You agreed to do the following:

1. Arrange for the salvage of the cargo:

(a) Siphon out as much free water as possible, using Tom Pratt's crew.

(b) Run a water-content analysis on the sample sent to you by the Thomas Chemical Company and, after removing the free water and agitating each compartment, on samples of cargo; send results immediately to P. J. Krug in Chicago.

(c) Arrange for discharge of the cargo by W. H. Johnson and Company and shipment as soon as possible by tank car to Anderson City.

2. Prepare for repairs to the ship:
(a) Arrange with Tom Pratt for temporary care, including a watchman if necessary.
(b) Contact Mr. H. H. Branscome of the Norbet Company and ask for an estimate of total damage.
(c) Have the Port Wells Iron Works submit a bid for the necessary emergency repairs.
3. Prepare information for this office:
(a) A copy of the test results on the cargo.
(b) The bid for the repair of the ship.
(c) Branscome's estimate of the total damage.
(d) Your barge unloading report (in triplicate).
(e) A statement of expenses for salvaging the cargo.
(f) A copy of each of the documents to be turned over to you by Mr. E. T. Brainard.
(g) Any other pertinent information.

We shall let you know as soon as we have made arrangements for storage and reclamation of the cargo at Anderson City and will give you authority to proceed with the emergency repairs as soon as we have checked with the insurance people.

All of us up here appreciate your prompt and efficient handling of this emergency.

J. C. SMITH

Now let us look at the young man in the port city. Which memorandum will be most helpful to him? They give him the same information. Both are clear enough about what he should do. But if he is to *use* the first, he will have to make a check list which will look very much like the second memorandum. The second memorandum was the one which J. C. Smith, an efficient and considerate man, actually sent to Tom.

If he had been less considerate, he would have called in his secretary as soon as he put down the phone. Instead he took a careful look at the notes he had made during the telephone conversation:

"RS" cargo ⟶ Anderson
Disch—WHJ
Est—H H Branscome
In port—T Pratt
Insurance estimate (Brans)
P W Iron—Emerg repairs
    (Send figs.)
Exp Disch Cargo (WHJ)
Siphon first using T P

Analyses—T Chem and cargo test reports
Tank-car shipment
Send unloading report (trip)
Also Brainard dope
Test reports { Krug / JCS
Auth to be sent
Anything else—send along

If he had dictated from these notes, Mr. Smith would have produced a memorandum like the first version. Instead he looked at his notes to see if they might be grouped in a way which would be helpful to his subordinate. In a minute he had jotted down the following at the bottom of his pad:

Tom to handle
1. Salvage of cargo
2. Repair of ship
3. Send here for ins.

JCS to handle
4. Send notifications

Then he went through the list of notes he had jotted down. Before each item which had to do with salvage of the cargo, he wrote the figure "1." Before each item having to do with repair of the ship, he wrote a "2." Before each item having to do with the insurance information he himself needed, he put a "3."

Under "4," the notifications which Smith had agreed to provide, there were only two items. Smith made a mental note that they probably need not be formally listed, especially as Tom did not have to take any action on them.

Smith's next step was to glance at the items before which he had placed a "1." Since they fell naturally into a rough chronological order which was not the order in which he had them on his pad, he put (a), (b), and (c), after the three 1's. After ordering the items under the other headings in the same way, he was ready to dictate:

4a "RS" cargo ⟶ Anderson
1c Disch—WHJ
2b Est—H H Branscome
2a In port—T Pratt
3c Insurance estimate (Brans)
2c P W Iron—Emerg repairs
3b (Send figs.)

3e Exp Disch Cargo (WHJ)
1a Siphon first using T P
1b Analyses—T Chem and cargo test reports
4a Tank-car shipment
3d Send unloading report (trip)
3f Also Brainard dope
1b Test reports {Krug / JCS}
4b Auth to be sent
3g Anything else—send along

This scheme may look complicated, but it was easy to dictate from and helped Smith to write a clear and effective memorandum.

If there had been many more items, he would probably have entirely rewritten his original notes, a more time-consuming device. He would have written down the first of the four types of information he was transmitting —"Salvage of cargo"—and listed below the various items pertaining to it:

Salvage of cargo
  Disch—WHJ
  Siphon using TP
  Analyses—T Chem and cargo—Krug

He would cross off these items from his telephone notes and then begin to work on the second, third, and fourth categories. After numbering the items on each list in an appropriate order, he would then be ready to dictate. For a writer dealing with a complex communication, the investment of a few more minutes is well worth the added clarity.

The memorandum which we have been discussing is complex. Seldom is a businessman called upon to sort out so much specific information for a short communication. Seldom, in fact, does the information come to him in such a confused form. But even a short letter or memo, to be effective, must have an organization useful to the writer in getting across his message —which in the long run always means an organization which will help the reader to understand and act upon the message. Because Smith had done his job well, Tom was able to use the memorandum as a check list. He could have no excuse for failure to do any part of his job. If Tom had received the first version of the memo, he would have had to reorganize the materials for himself before getting down to work.

By taking the few minutes necessary to organize his memorandum so that it would be useful to Tom, J. C. Smith also saved himself a considerable amount of time and prevented slip-ups at the home office. As a good super-

visor, he would have to check to be sure that he got all the information he asked for. When he provided Tom with a careful outline of what to do, he also provided himself with a useful check sheet. When the information from Tom arrived, he could tell very quickly whether he had everything he needed by checking it against his carbon copy of the memorandum. To have used the first version of the memorandum as a check sheet, he would have had to spend many exasperating minutes tracking down the various items. And still he might have missed something.

Steps in Planning a Communication

With this illustration in mind, let us formulate a useful procedure for preparing any communication. For some communications, all of the following steps may not be necessary, but only in writing the simplest messages can one safely omit more than one or two of them.

1. Determine Real Purpose or Function

Determining the real purpose of a communication is not always as simple as it may seem. If J. C. Smith had been asked when he put the telephone down, "J. C., what is your purpose in writing a memo to Tom?", he might well have answered, "To confirm our arrangements, of course." Confirmation was, to be sure, one function of the memorandum, but it was not the most important function. If confirmation alone had been the purpose, the less effective version would have done the job. Everything was there. The *real* function of Smith's memorandum was to help Tom to carry out his assignment completely and effectively.

To take another example, a company president was asked to report to his board of directors on the productive capacity of three of his plants. He prepared an excellent report, the ostensible purpose of which was to indicate the productive capacity of the plants. But for some time he had been convinced that one of them, in a town called Middlebury, was located too far from the source of its raw materials and that the company should therefore sell it and procure another plant in an area rich in the required materials. Thus the real purpose of the report was to convince the board that the Middlebury plant should be abandoned; he selected his materials and language and organized the report accordingly.

The real purpose of a letter answering an inquiry about a product is usually not to provide information but to sell the product. The stated purpose of a memorandum altering a procedure in a plant may be to improve efficiency, but its real purpose may be to head off a strike by improving morale. The real purpose of a letter explaining a process may be to ward off a suit against the company.

It is easy to be unconcerned about the necessity for isolating the real purpose of a communication. But our study of business writing has convinced us that it *is* necessary to drag the real purpose out into the open, that the writer of any communication, except the most routine, must sit back and ask himself: "What is my real purpose here? What am I really trying to do?" Unless he does so, he is likely to focus on his ostensible purpose and assume that his real purpose will somehow take care of itself. But it will not take care of itself, and the communication will not have its full potential effect. What we advise, therefore, is developing the *habit* of seeking out the real purpose of a communication as the first step in preparing to write.

It may seem obvious to say that the writer of any communication should have a clear picture of the situation with which he deals. But in many instances a writer will sit down to prepare a report without any clear notion of many aspects of his problem but with a vague feeling that as he plunges into the report, he will miraculously obtain insight. Needless to say, this is like starting down a river in a motorboat without being sure how to operate the motor.

2. *Gather Materials*

Every writer realizes that he must have in hand the necessary materials in order to complete a letter, memo, or report. But all too often he begins to compose his communication before he has gathered *all* of his information. The inefficiency of this procedure can be illustrated in any large office a hundred times a day.

Let us take one example. Bob Wentworth has been out of town for a few days. He arrives at the office, reads through the accumulation of mail on his desk, and picks out letters that have to be answered immediately. Soon he calls in his secretary and dictates his first letter—to a plant superintendent:

> **Dear Tom:**
>
> **I can understand your reluctance to alter the proposed location of the catwalk above Vat No. 4 in the new facility. However, our safety engineers insist that there would be a serious hazard to the operator from the fumes. After I last wrote you, Bill Parsons made a third suggestion which you may prefer to the ones which have been made so far.**

Bob leans over and pulls open a drawer of his desk as he continues: "He plans to move Vat No. 4 six feet to . . . Just a minute, Stella. That report should be in here somewhere." Two or three minutes later he gives up the search and sits back with a puzzled frown. Stella breaks in: "You didn't by any chance give it to Mr. Thomas, did you, Mr. Wentworth?" Light breaks over Bob's face. "No, I didn't. But I did lend it to Ben Garver. Just a minute, Stella." A phone call to Ben's secretary confirms the presence of the report in his office. "Stella, would you mind running over to Mr. Garver's office and picking up that report?" Stella goes, of course. It's not her time that's being wasted.

Fifteen minutes after the interruption, Ben is ready to resume.

> **He plans to move Vat No. 4 three feet closer to Vat No. 3. The catwalk can then go between the two mixers at that end of the building. The added cost involved will be nominal. The original estimate was. . . .**

Ben now has in his hand a report of over 100 pages. He is rapidly turning them. After much rustling of paper he finds the page he wants and continues:

> **. . . original estimate was $89,920 for the whole unit. Bill expects the new set-up to run about a thousand more. When Bill first raised the question of moving the catwalk, I wrote to Larry Cotton at Purvis Chemical because I remembered his telling me about a similar problem. . . .**

"Stella, do we have Mr. Cotton's reply in the files? We do. Could you dig it out for me? I'll need that to strengthen my argument."

We need not follow Ben any further. The point is obvious. Instead of gathering—or having his secretary gather—the materials he needed to answer Tom's letter, he began to dictate. Then he was forced to interrupt his dictation to refer to other papers or send his secretary out for a report. As a result, therefore, his dictating performance is a dismal one. It wastes his time and his secretary's time, disrupts his thought pattern so that his

letter is probably incoherent, and frays both his nerves and Stella's. Unfortunately, far too many executives attempt to prepare correspondence in this harum-scarum manner.

When a writer has collected all of the information pertinent to a communication, he must proceed—mentally at least—to fit each piece into a logically organized outline. He classifies each fact under an appropriate heading and orders the headings to provide an accurate picture of the total situation as he understands it. In his mind or on paper, he has a clear, logical (although perhaps informal) outline of his material. Behind each argument he arranges his supporting evidence. But he is not yet ready to write.

3. Select Materials Useful for Real Purpose

Often, the writer must select from a mass of material the information that he will use in his communication. How does he go about it? Let us take an example.

Bill Southworth has been assigned to investigate five possible sites for a small manufacturing plant which his company wishes to build and to recommend the most feasible ones. He has coordinated the work of a staff of investigators who have studied exhaustively the potentialities of each site. He now has a drawer full of reports from his staff and must prepare his own report with recommendations to his superiors. In his mind, all of the materials which have been submitted to him are carefully marshaled under headings: construction costs, transportation facilities, potential labor force, accessibility of raw materials, and so on. He can, if he wishes, compare in detail the probable construction costs, the transportation facilities, and the labor force available for each site. But should he?

If he has thought carefully before preparing the report, he will have realized that his purpose is not to compare the sites: it is to provide useful information on which his superiors may base a decision involving millions of dollars. He must, therefore, select from the evidence available only that which will be genuinely useful to them for this purpose. As he looks over his materials, therefore, Bill Southworth begins to select. First, Site *A*. He has the fattest report of all on that one. His investigators have combed the area for him. He could write a detailed sociological study of it. At first this area seemed to be the most likely candidate, but the owner of the available site died suddenly, leaving the plot to the state as a wild-life sanctuary. The fat

file on Site *A* must be reduced in his report to a brief paragraph explaining why Site *A* must be removed from consideration. The statistics so carefully arranged and interpreted will have to remain in the files.

Site *B* looks like an excellent candidate, but Site *C* does not. In many respects it would be ideal, but the source of raw materials on which the company is counting, although easily accessible, will be adequate for five years at most. Importing the raw materials thereafter will not be economical, and no new sources are available in the area. Once again Bill consigns a mountain of information to the files and decides that only the data on raw materials are really needed for his report.

Bill's experience with Site *D* is similar. This time the labor force proves to be inadequate. Therefore, the bulk of his final report will consist not of a comparison of five sites, but of two—Sites *B* and *E*. The sections of the report on the other sites will discuss largely the reasons for ruling them out.

Although Bill Southworth's report was complex, his decisions were not difficult to make once he had his purpose clearly in mind. The temptation, of course, was to include the impressive statistics which he had obtained on Sites *A*, *C*, and *D*, despite the fact that they were no longer relevant. Frequently the effective selection of materials for a communication involves the omission of available but irrelevant materials. The writer of a manual for servicing equipment will seldom need to include complete information on how the equipment is constructed or on the principles of mechanics that are involved, though he may be an expert on both subjects. A director of public relations, writing a statement to be distributed to stockholders about a prolonged strike, will select from a vast amount of information only the key matters which are of significant concern to the stockholders.

Here again we come back to the reader. It is his needs which govern the inclusion of information. The president who writes a memorandum to his department or division heads on the significance of a new law to his company will select certain materials from his logically organized over-all view of the situation. If he writes a memorandum for distribution to workers, he will select other materials. For his stockholders he will make a third selection. If he is wise, he will select in each instance with his purpose clearly in mind. He may need to encourage department heads to consider means for taking best advantage of the law's provisions; he may need to clarify his company's attitude toward the law to the men in the plant; he may need to head off a demand by his stockholders for increased

dividends. No one group can be effectively influenced by exhaustive analysis of a total situation. What concerns the stockholder may be of no concern whatever to the man on the assembly line. And what concerns the department head may not interest the stockholder.

The writer should not forget, however, that there are many occasions when he must check to be sure that he has selected enough material to carry out his purpose and satisfy the reader. This is most frequently true, perhaps, when he writes to an individual less familiar with a situation than he. He may know, for example, that all orders for a certain product are processed by his company's Denver office. If he fails to tell a potential customer to order directly from Denver, he may waste people's time. If he does not indicate in writing a set of specifications that all wire used is to be copper wire capable of handling 2300 volts, he may waste a great deal of his company's time and money.

A writer must, then, consider his reader and the real purpose of his communication, and select only those materials—but *all* of those materials—which are needed to get his reader to think, feel, or act as he wants him to. Materials which are not relevant to this aim must be discarded.

4. Order Materials to Achieve Real Purpose

The proper selection of materials will not, however, guarantee an effective communication. One may collect the finest building materials obtainable, but one does not have a house until the materials are fitted together to form a carefully articulated whole. The parts of a watch spread out on a table do not communicate the hour of the day; they must be carefully put together before accurate communication is possible. So it is with verbal communication. J. C. Smith had all the material he needed to write his memorandum about the salvage of the damaged barge and its cargo. But, as we have seen, he could still have written an ineffective communication.

Order, like selection, depends on the purpose and on the reader. When an executive is discussing the promotion of a man in his department, he will almost always begin with the man's faults and end with his virtues if he is in favor of the promotion. If he is not in favor of the promotion, he will begin with the man's virtues and end with his faults. Why? Because he knows that his audience will tend to be most influenced by what they hear last. Similarly, when explaining why a machine has been modified,

an engineer will not only select different materials but will also use a different approach and a different ordering of his materials in presenting his case to his department head and to an operator on the assembly line. If he uses an order based on the most logical organization of the materials in his own mind, he may not be successful with either.

Order will also be affected by the nature of the communication. A report of a watchman's activities during his tour of duty and a report on the growth of the aluminum industry will probably use chronological order. A sales report may use a geographical order. A progress report may be organized according to types of problems met and solved. A personnel report may be organized by rank, or by salary bracket, or by length of service. But the most effective order will always be the one which will be most useful to the reader.

5. *Check against Purpose*

By the time the writer has determined the real purpose of his communication, gathered his materials, clarified his own thinking, and selected and ordered his materials, he should be ready to write. But if his communication problem is a complex or delicate one, he will do well to stop at this point, look at what he has decided to do, and ask himself, "Will the plan I have formulated really do the job that I need to do? Will it satisfy the real purpose of the communication? Will it do the job in the most effective way possible?"

It is not easy for a writer to force himself to take this step. By the time he has reached this point he is "rarin' to go"—especially if he has worked up a thoroughly logical and interesting plan. But failure to stop for a check here is as dangerous as failing to check gas supply before taking an airplane up. The plane may be properly fueled—but if it is not, the crash is likely to be spectacular. Failure to stop for a check after the plan is completed frequently results in a report which does not satisfy the reader because it does not do the job. If the writer does not recognize his failure until he looks over the completed draft of the communication, he has wasted a great deal of time. Most of us will be so carried away by the eloquent phrasing of the final version that we will not see our failure at all and will send out the letter or report as it is. But the results may not meet our expectations. In the long run, a final check of purpose, suitability of material, and organization before the actual writing is inexpensive insurance.

6. *Write*

After his plan has been carefully checked and found suitable for his determined purpose, the writer is ready to prepare a draft of the completed communication. He should write deliberately and according to plan. If he finds himself deviating from the plan, he will need to stop and consider the effect of the deviation on the ultimate effect of his communication. He may, as a result, modify his plan, or he may strike out the deviating material and return to his original scheme. Whichever his course, he must be sure he always knows where he is going and why.

The language of the communication must also be keyed to the audience and the purpose. Technical or esoteric terms are not likely to improve communication to a laboring man. Slang and a "clap on the shoulder" tone will probably not be appreciated by a company president if they come from a subordinate. The most carefully planned attack may lose all of its effect if the writer's language is judged by the reader to be frivolous or insulting.

7. *Recheck against Purpose*

After the draft of the communication is completed, the work is not done. The draft must then be carefully checked against the original purpose to be sure that the finished product will do the job that has to be done. Not only the over-all effect, but also the effect of each paragraph, must be tested carefully. Where sentences, paragraphs, or sections do not appear to be suitable, they must be revised and the whole communication tested in its revised form. Only when every phrase is just right is the job completed.

The Value of Method

The procedure outlined above is admittedly an ideal one. It is, we believe, very effective for important letters or reports which should be prepared with care and precision. But frequently, as any businessman knows, reports must be prepared under great pressure to meet an "unrealistic" deadline. A report on the sales potential of a new product may be a three-month job—but the boss usually wants it next Monday! One might

argue, too, that to apply the procedure to most of the letters and memoranda that the businessman has to write would be bringing in a steam roller to crack a walnut.

There is a certain measure of truth in both of these objections. Our reply is simply this: those writers who have trained themselves to follow a procedure similar to the one outlined above prove most adept both at preparing crash reports and at writing effective brief communications. A quick review of the steps we have suggested may indicate why this is so:

1. Determine real purpose or function of the communication
2. Gather materials
3. Select materials useful for real purpose
4. Order materials to achieve real purpose
5. Check against purpose
6. Write
7. Recheck against purpose

The man who habitually uses this procedure wastes a minimum of time and effort. Hence he is well equipped to handle a rush job. Because he begins by thinking through to the real purpose of his job, he soon knows exactly where he is going. He will gather only materials that are pertinent to his purpose, automatically excluding all extraneous material. He will arrange his evidence in an appropriate order. Checking back to his purpose insures him against wasting time in writing up material which will ultimately prove irrelevant and against submitting a communication that does not do the job required. In short, he is a professional who can be counted on to act effectively and efficiently under any conditions; when an emergency arises, his trained reflexes automatically come into play and enable him to meet it with maximum effect.

Signposts for the Reader

There is no substitute for an organized approach to a piece of writing. Such an approach will be reflected in the writing itself. A well-organized communication will always be more effective than a disorganized one, no matter what ingenious devices are used to conceal the deficiencies of the latter. There are ways of increasing the effectiveness even of a well-organized communication by providing the reader with signposts which emphasize its structure. The most important signpost, of course, is the appropriate

punctuation mark: the comma which says "go slow"; the period which says "stop"; the colon which warns us that something important is just ahead; and the rest. Punctuation, as we have seen in Chapter 9, communicates nothing itself, but it is vital to the communication process because it helps the reader to spot at a glance the organization of a sentence. The reader who sees a sentence punctuated like this

————————: ——————; ——————; ——————.

knows before he reads the words that he will have to concern himself with a statement and three other statements which serve to explain the first or which together constitute the first. The reader who sees

——————, ————, ——————————.

may assume that his sentence will probably contain either a modifier or an appositive. If he sees

————————————————; ——————————————.

he may assume that he will be working with a two-part sentence, each part of which carries approximately the same weight. One could multiply these illustrations. The point is clear: punctuation is a key signpost of organization.

Another important signpost is parallel structure, which was discussed in Chapter 8. In a sales report, when we see the sentence

> The customer stated that on May 1 he had placed his order through our Dallas office, that on May 16 he had cancelled it by telephone, that on May 17 he had sent Tom Merson a letter confirming the cancellation, that on July 1 the shipment had arrived at El Paso, that Dallas had given him "the merry run around" when he inquired about returning it, and that he did not intend to place another order with us until "H— freezes over."

our thoughts are carefully channeled. We are reminded as each new fact is stated that we are reading what the customer said happened. If we tend to stray from the path, along comes a signpost—*that*—to put us back on the road. What is more, the repetition of the same general structure in each item provides a pattern, a series of rails, for us to follow. Note what happens if this structure is abandoned and the *that* is omitted:

> The customer stated his order was placed through our Dallas office on May 1, and on May 16 a telephone call to Tom Merson cancelled it, it arrived on July 1 at El Paso, and Dallas inquiry resulted in a

"merry run around," that he did not intend to place another order with us "until H— freezes over."

Without the parallel structure the reader has to pry the sentence apart. Without the proper punctuation, the sentence would be unreadable.

Parallelism and the key words which point up parallelism are useful to impress upon the reader the organization of ideas which the writer is presenting. Sometimes, however, a long series of items strung out over several lines is awkward. Individual items tend to get lost in the shuffle, especially if they are short. Whenever we bring in a series for discussion in a seminar, we are asked: "Why not list the items: 1, 2, 3, 4, etc.?" When he wrote to his subordinate about the damaged barge, J. C. Smith decided to use three lists, each containing a group of related actions which the young man had agreed to take (see p. 218). Thus his memorandum became a check list by which he provided Tom and himself with some insurance against omissions. But he was just as careful to use parallel structure throughout as he would have been if he had not used numbers. He did not fall into the common trap of assuming that because he had numbered his items, he need pay no attention to their structure. A list, he knew, must have both integrity and parallel structure. His had both.

Some lists are very long, and others contain very long items. There are reports, for example, which are really lists. Take one which begins: "The monthly inventory reports of the 12 warehouses on the West Coast contained the following significant comments on the effectiveness of the T-and-H drive to persuade some retail outlets to switch to Loxone." The comments could simply be listed in a random order. But the writer of the report will probably organize the replies into groups: those which indicate that T and H is having success; those which indicate that T and H is not having success; those which indicate that it is too early to tell yet; those which report no evidence of the T-and-H campaign. If the pattern of the replies indicated a geographical trend in the effectiveness of the drive, the writer might feel it advisable to organize his replies on a geographical basis: Oregon, Washington, Northern California, Southern California. If warehouses in the large cities showed a different picture from warehouses in smaller cities, he might wish to organize the replies to point up this fact.

Whatever he does, however, he will use headings—signposts to indicate to his reader the organization which he has given to his materials. In dealing with other major writing jobs, he will find that the longer his communication the more attention he must give not only to the organization of

materials but also to the ways of emphasizing the organizational structure of his work. To handle this job he has a useful set of signposts, titles and subtitles.

Illustrative Materials

1

A group of engineering educators has formulated the stages which they feel are essential to the solution of a problem in their profession. Compare the stages listed below with those we have suggested for preparing a communication.

Stage 1. Define the problem.
Collect and analyze the facts in relation to the original question in order to fully discover and define the problem.

Stage 2. Plan its treatment.
Determine what values, principles, attitudes, and basic practices are applicable to the problem. Plan the means of dealing with the facts in the light of these ways of approach.

Stage 3. Execute the plan.
Carry through the plan so as to reach a decision, product, or result. (Often the decision does not end the problem but clarifies or changes the issue so that the problem is started over in a new aspect.)

Stage 4. Check the work as a whole before using the solution.
Go over the results, first systematically, then realistically in terms of use, and at last with reference to the general knowledge and experience of that field.

Stage 5. Learn and generalize if possible.
Take thought to find what can be learned that may be of use in future problems.

Note also the following comments on the list:

These stages cannot be considered a rigid sequence to be followed in handling any problem. Often the solver first must go through the problem roughly in order to discover its essentials before attempting a thorough treatment. Often also he may have to return to prior stages, or even repeat

them all, as he gains enlightenment in the course of developing the problem. And whenever appropriate, one or more of the following functions must be performed in connection with any stage, or in connection with the problem as a whole.

Function 1. Simplification
- a. by restricting assumptions
- b. by condensed, exact statement in words or in symbols

Function 2. Alternation between analysis and insight.

Function 3. Checking validity, both systematically and realistically in terms of use

Function 4. Using all that can be learned by experience as the solution proceeds as a basis for correction and as a guide to future steps, even if this involves radical change in the problem or its treatment.*

2

Below is a statement by Richard I. Felver, a professor and consultant in industrial design, in which he indicates how he and his colleagues solve their problems.† Compare his statement with that of the engineering educators and with our suggestions for solving a writing problem.

In the design of practical things we have a more or less professional system that we follow. Usually there is a statement of the problem, but this, even when stated clearly, is usually wrong or inadequate. A problem arises from a conflict between criteria and a situation. Here we start. We study the situation: the background of the problem. This may be called a study, a survey, an analysis, or the like. It is essentially an orderly observation. Next we find that some things are related to other things and in particular ways. We begin to structure the situation. Now it is time to investigate the criteria. These too we order into a structure. Gradually the real problem comes to light. Sometimes cold hard logic may solve the problem, but we cannot trust this answer. We question if a better, more significant, or more effective solution is possible. This is the agony of integrity. If we do not

* B. Richard Teare, Jr., "The Use of Problems and Instances to Make Education Professional," in *Education for Professional Responsibility* (Pittsburgh: Carnegie Press, 1945), pp. 144–145.

† We are grateful to Professor Felver for permitting us to use his statement.

arrive at this point and pass through it, we are at best intelligent, competent hacks.

We continue our work. Our real answer must come to us with its own authority. It is more than logically right; there is conviction—it is creative! This creative answer may come in a series of little insights or may burst perplexingly into our consciousness. It may take its own good time—hours, days, months, yes even years! We must if necessary, wait in humble deliberation. If we have completed our study, checked it carefully, and explored all possible avenues to the true answer and nothing comes, we quit, rest, try something else. Then in the black deep inside of us, there seems to be a rearranging, a changing, a gradual reorganization going on without our conscious awareness. Then when awakening, shaving, lifting a piece of food to our mouth, or rising from a seat in a street car, we suddenly know the true answer, and we may excitedly say to a stranger, "That's right, right, right." He looks at us as if to say, "You are mad, mad, mad."

We are not finished yet. These flashes of insight can be wrong or only partial. Now we are back in the light, however, and we can use our tools of logic and common sense. We check our solution against the situation. Most likely, even when we are most clearly creative, there is quite a bit of adjusting to do. Sometimes the necessary adjusting ruins the solution, so back into the well we go again.

Eventually through faith we get the job done. The client asks sometimes, "How did you come to think of that?" And we may reply, "Only God knows!" He laughs, thinking it a joke. He doesn't know that it is the truth.

What elements do the three statements have in common? Where do they differ? Why?

3

Here is a set of instructions designed for businessmen who dictate:

Two aims should be foremost in your mind when you dictate: (1) to produce as effective a communication as possible and (2) to help your stenographer by providing clear instructions and clear dictation. The following suggestions will help you dictate well:

1. Before you begin to dictate
   a. *Assemble all necessary information.*

Scrambling around for missing materials wastes your stenographer's time and will probably cause you to write an incoherent, disconnected sentence—or, worse yet, to make a mess of the whole communication.

b. *Know* What *you want to say.*
Too many dictators "think" their problems into a letter or memo. The result: much backing and filling by the writer; confusion for the reader.

c. *Write down a plan.*
If the communication is short, you may not need a complete plan. But if you expect to dictate more than a paragraph, you will find it helpful to jot down, either on the letter to be answered or on a pad, a carefully ordered list of the items to be covered. Use arrows to revise the order, if necessary.

> Thanks
> Test-run results
> J's decision
> Pass along
> Looks good
> Hello Tom

d. *Give your stenographer the information she needs:*
Are you about to dictate a letter, memo, or report?
Rough copy or smooth?
How many copies? Marked or blind?
To whom do copies go?
Any other special instructions?

2. During dictation
   a. *Start right in with some substance.* Avoid stock openings.
   b. *Follow your plan.*
   c. *Before you dictate a sentence, think it through to the end.* If you do, you can't dictate a sentence that is too long, and you won't tangle yourself in a grammatical maze.
   d. *Dictate at least a full clause at a time in normal speaking voice.* Be sure to modulate your voice so that the stenographer will know where to insert minor punctuation. (Cigars, cigarettes, and pipes are major hazards. Keep them out of your mouth when you dictate.)
   e. *End with a specific request or suggestion.* If you do not have a real one, just stop. Whatever you do, avoid rubber-stamp conclusions. Nobody reads them anyway.

And there is always room for improvement.

1. At least once a week read over a few of your letters. Try to spot rubber-stamp phrasing, words which you overwork, heavy phrasing, repetition, and confusing organization.

2. Your stenographer is human: work *with* her, not against her. Talk things over now and then. Encourage her—within limits—to suggest improvements. Encourage her—without limits—to ask questions when she doesn't understand what you want. And don't forget to compliment her now and then for a job well done.

Materials for Revision

The following items contain examples of certain errors discussed in this chapter. Revising them will reinforce your understanding of the problems involved and your ability to recognize similar mistakes and to avoid making them in your own writing.

A

Indicate the proper paragraph breaks in the following memorandum:

I feel that a man with both technical and administrative training, with the accent on technical, would be best suited for the position of production manager. Someone with plant background who also has training in administrative procedures here in New York would be preferable. Plant training is essential to this manager in order to best correlate sales programs with plant capacities and raw material availability. He must supervise preparation of planning schedules to insure our making the best use of our plant facilities. It is also necessary that this manager be familiar with our procedures and costs in order to protect profits. He, therefore, should have administrative ability to properly coordinate this phase of his department's work with the material allocation phase. Administrative training will also give him better appreciation of the problems of the other departments with which he must work closely. A man with these qualifications would, in my opinion, be well qualified to handle this job.

B

The following business communications are poorly organized. Rewrite them.

1. Enclosed find two (2) prints of 806 proposed vacuum-line layout on subject contract. Please mark one print with your approval and/or comments and return as promptly as possible. Frankly we are not too happy with this ar-

rangement because of the possibility of clogging of the vacuum line and the difficulties to be encountered cleaning it out.

However this scheme is in line with the thinking that was started during our visit to your offices on July 11, when it was decided to put the rupture disc discharge line inside the vacuum line, and we have not been able to appreciably improve the problem of cleanout.

2. SUBJECT: Special Limousine, XX7348

Mr. F. L. Hood
711 Shanango Street
Chicago, Illinois

Dear Mr. Hood:

This letter is to report the progress of the subject job. The frame is completely built and ready for painting. The fenders, turret top, hood, and side and rear panels are all completed ready for installation.

I doubt if I will be able to complete it by the end of the year but it will probably be the first week in January; however, I can report that most of the work is done. During this last two weeks other obligations will keep me from completing the job but I plan to have it by the first week of January.

As you have requested, I am sending a separate billing for this work.

Very truly yours,

OSCAR F. BUILDER

P.S. On the subject painting—I have your letter and instructions for painting. However, I wondered if you would care to have wheels painted a more contrasting color rather than the standard grey of the body. I would appreciate your comments on the painting of the wheels. I also am assuming that the body will be two-tone grey. If not, please advise.

3. As you know, all sales to the Alpha Company are to be routed through the Sales Department of the Electrical Products Division and specifically to the attention of Mr. Deems.

There are occasional lapses in this procedure in the conduct of correspondence and in other details in regard to this matter, particularly those dealing with appliances.

Would you please emphasize to all your people that correspondence and official contacts with the Alpha Company are to go through the Sales Department, Electrical Products Division, Attention: Mr. Deems. Mr. Deems will see that all such matters receive prompt and adequate attention.

This is not meant to discourage informal contacts by any department with the Alpha Company. However, where any such informal contacts develop to the point where correspondence is initiated or sales are made, the

correspondence or sales must be routed through the Electrical Products Sales Department, Attention: Mr. Deems, as outlined above.

C

Reorganize the following chart so that it can be appended to a report entitled "The Amount and Kinds of Communication Done by Engineers in Section K7."

Engineering Reports—Written Preparation of

Name and Position	Engineering Lab work	Equipment & Design Specifications	Test Specifications	Equipment Progress Reports	Long Range Planning Reports	Overall Progress Reports	Conferences & Planning Meetings	Coordination of Personnel-Oral	Actual Design (Written)	Equipment & Hardware Follow-thru	Total
Group Project Engineer	2%	10%	5%	3%	5%	3%	45%	15%	10%	2%	100%
Engineer	10%	25%	5%	5%	0	0	5%	0	45%	5%	100%
Engineer	15%	20%	0	5%	0	0	0	0	50%	10%	100%
Engineer	15%	5%	10%	5%	0	0	0	0	15%	50%	100%
Engineer	15%	20%	0	5%	0	0	0	0	45%	15%	100%
Engineer	15%	20%	0	5%	0	0	0	0	50%	10%	100%
Engineer	10%	15%	0	10%	0	0	5%	0	45%	15%	100%

D

Rewrite each of the following:

1. On the basis of these data, the following is recommended:
   a. That arrangements be made with the Citizens' Utility Company to dehydrate the Minimar by some process other than their present procedure . . .
   b. Two formulations for producing a satisfactory QX-5 Minimar dependent upon the consistency of the dehydrated Minimar are shown below:

I. Based upon dehydrated Minimar having a consistency below QX-10 . . .

II. Based upon dehydrated Minmar having a consistency between QX-10 and 40°C., R & B . . .

2. A sample of Minimax produced at Chicago was prepared as follows:
   a. Screened into two separate fractions—¼″ to #4 mesh and passing #4 mesh.
   b. The Minimax that passed the #4 mesh screen was further fractionated as follows: . . .

12. Major Writing Assignments: The Report

In this book we have returned again and again to a single concept: a piece of communication—written or oral—can be judged only by how well it achieves the results desired by the writer or speaker. One cannot measure the effectiveness of a piece of writing without considering the writer's purpose and the reader for whom it is intended.

How Management Uses Reports

In order to discuss report writing, we must first look at how reports are used. Let us take an example from a large corporation: a report on the building and testing of a solid-state dc amplifier. The distribution list shows that it went to the vice president for engineering, to the assistant to the vice president for home products, to the manager of the patent department, to three staff engineering managers, to personnel in two research departments, and to line personnel in fifteen different operating departments.

How will each of these people use the report? The vice president for engineering receives dozens of reports of this kind every day. Even if he

did nothing else, he would not be able to read them all. And he has many other things to do. Still, he must keep informed about new developments. In today's highly competitive market, corporations spend huge sums preparing for the future. Management must make the most of the products of research and development.

To keep up with engineering developments in his own company, therefore, this vice president and his staff must be highly efficient. Each morning his secretary gives him a list of the titles of the reports which came in the day before. She gives him many other things at the same time: the rough drafts of two speeches he is to give the next week, a batch of letters to be answered, the information that he will need to take to a meeting with the president, management-development forms on which he has to rate several of his assistants, the testimony of the president of a competing company before a House of Representatives subcommittee inquiring into monopolistic practices in industry, a series of new regulations from the Patent Office in Washington, a report on an equipment failure which stopped production for three hours in a plant with 2500 employees, and a schedule of appointments and conferences which leaves him with about forty minutes of reading time. Unforeseen problems that arise during the day will probably cut into even that short period.

The vice president reads quickly down the list, pausing occasionally to put a check beside the titles of those reports he wants to see, among them "Solid-state DC Amplifier." His secretary then brings him the checked reports. Opening the one on top of the pile, he glances through the abstract on the title page: ". . . capable of accepting a number of isolated DC input signals and providing these with a power gain of approximately 10^5. . . . time of response . . . 3 milliseconds. . . . quite stable . . . less then .5-percent drift. . . . power gains . . . 10^8 . . . input level of 10^{-6} watts. . . ." The abstract concludes: "The amplifier can be used in a wide range of industrial applications when high performance solid-state non-thermionic reliability is needed." Turning to the distribution list, he notes who has received copies. Then he says to his secretary, "Send a memo to A. V. Smith in Product Development asking him if the amplifier described in development report 703–21–49 (3) will solve our problem at Youngville. He has a copy of it. Then call Development and have them send a copy to Will Frank at Brownsville. I think he'd be interested in it." Before handing the report back to the secretary he glances down the table of contents and looks at the name on the front cover: "Milligan? Must be a new man."

The next report that he picks up is entitled "Heat Sinks." He had checked it on the list because he knew that the company was having difficulty cooling power transistors in several new products that it was developing. Opening the cover, he finds text: no title page, no identifying report number, no abstract—not even a heading; just 28 lines of type, which begin:

> The purpose of the work described was to achieve two goals. The first goal was to learn . . .

Thinking that he can find out something by looking at the conclusions, he flips through the report looking for them. He stops turning pages to look at a photograph immediately following page 5. Beneath the picture he reads:

> Plate I
>
> Photograph of several heat sinks and surface finishes that were tested. (Refer to "Heat Sink Designations.")
>
> Top row, left to right: 1c, 1d, 1p.
> Middle row: 2b, 2c, 2g, 2f.
> Front row: 3a, 3b, 5c.

He turns back to page 5, but finds nothing helpful there. The items described on page 5 are 5d, 5e, 5f, 6, 7a, 7b, 7c, 7d, and 7e. He finally finds 1c described on page 2. Item 1d is also described on page 2; 1p on page 3; and 2b, 2c, 2g, 2f, 3a, 3b, and 5c on page 4.

More and more irritated at not being able to get what he wants from the report, he resumes his hunt for the conclusions. Since the body of the report is not separated in any way from the appendixes, he has difficulty in locating the end of it. Finding at last what appears to be the first of many graphs, he turns back to the preceding page, page 14. No heading indicates *Conclusion,* so he turns to page 13, and then to pages 12, 11, and 10. Returning to page 14, he begins to read: "The fabrication of the sink discussed above was a preliminary step toward a final design being developed by F. E. Jones of this department." Since that paragraph obviously does not contain the conclusion, he goes on to the next: "It appears that the Redding sink is about as efficient a design as can be made practically . . . Some improvement . . . ; this test was planned but not completed."

Looking at the end of the report for the distribution list, the vice president does not find one. Returning to the cover, he notes that the report has no identification number. He looks at the name of the author: Taylor.

Thoroughly annoyed, he throws the report on his desk and goes on to the next one.

The two reports that we have discussed are not fictitious. We have them in our files. The first was arranged so that the vice president could find what he wanted in less than two minutes. The second was not arranged. The material was presented in a solid mass. The vice president spent almost five minutes looking for what he wanted and did not find it. What he did learn about the research which had been done was incomplete: he wasn't sure what its results were; he didn't know whether the test that "was planned but not completed" would ever be completed; he didn't know to whom the report had been sent; and he didn't know how to refer to it. Understandably, he gave up in disgust. If he remembered, he might try to find out about the research from the head of the development department the next time he saw him. If not, the report would eventually be filed somewhere without ever really having been read by a man who might have used it to solve a crucial problem plaguing the company's new products.

There are other ramifications, too. Both Milligan and Taylor made an impression on the vice president. "Every report is an application either for promotion or demotion." The episode that we have just described is a vivid demonstration of the truth of that statement. Taylor's research may have been every bit as significant and as skillfully carried out as Milligan's; but his only reward is a black mark against him in the vice president's book.

Milligan's report on the solid-state dc amplifier was sent to many other people besides the vice president. The assistant to the vice president for home products examined it in much the way that the vice president for engineering did. Two of the three staff engineering managers skimmed the full report, read the conclusions carefully, and passed it on to subordinates for more careful reading and evaluation. Someone in the patent department read the abstract and table of contents, skipped the introduction, read the sections on switching principles and circuits, and examined parts of two of the three appendixes carefully. In the research department the abstract was read and the report filed.

In one of the operating departments, the engineering manager read the entire report carefully, appendixes and all; then he reread it and gave it to his assistant, who also examined it minutely. The two men then discussed it and passed it on to a subordinate for a cost analysis. He examined the appendixes even more minutely. A. V. Smith in Product Development and Will Frank also read the report from cover to signature and studied the appendixes.

The Parts of a Report

A report should be so constructed that a reader can pick it up and get what he needs from it, whether what he needs is the title only, the abstract, the summary, a detailed report, or a detailed report with supporting materials. A good report moves in several stages from the very general (the title) to the very specific (the appendixes). Each appendix is full of specific detail; the report itself contains some detail from the appendixes but is primarily devoted to generalizations based on the details in them; the summary, the abstract, and the table of contents all cover the same ground as the report, but each is more general than the body of the report. Finally, and most abstract of all, is the title.

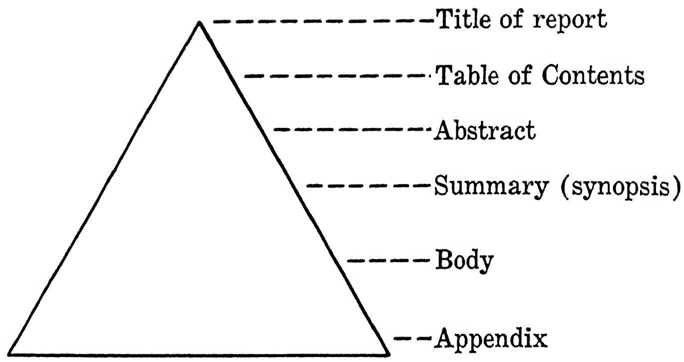
The report, then, can be thought of in terms of the abstraction ladder which we discussed in Chapter 10.

Title:		**title of report**	
Table of Contents:	**section title$_1$**	**section title$_2$**	**section title$_3$**
Abstract:	**very broad generalization$_1$**	**very broad generalization$_2$**	**very broad generalization$_3$**
Summary:	**broad generalization$_1$**	**broad generalization$_2$**	**broad generalization$_3$**
Body:	**generalization$_1$**	**generalization$_2$**	**generalization$_3$**
Appendix:	**specific detail$_1$**	**specific detail$_2$**	**specific detail$_3$**

The number of items which make up each level decreases as we go up the ladder.

1. The Title

Thus the "title of report" is a single abstraction based upon hundreds, or even thousands, of specific details in the appendix. If we were to look at the structure of the report from a distance we would see a pyramid.



Even at the very top of the pyramid, however, the report writer must be careful not to be too general, too abstract. If the title is so general that it does not indicate the precise subject covered, the report may not be read at all. Thus a title should not read "Ultra-high Vacuum Valve" but "Electromagnetically Operated Ultra-high Vacuum Valve"; not "Molded Plastic Parts" but "Dimensional Stability of Molded Plastic Parts"; not "Sales Personnel" but "An Analysis of the Management Potential of 42 Staff Sales Personnel at Pittsburgh"; not "Polyethylene Marketing" but "A Program for Increasing Polyethylene Sales in the First Half of 1960."

2. *The Abstract*

The level below the title is the abstract, a very brief summary of the contents of the report. An abstract can either describe or inform. A *descriptive abstract* merely gives the topics and subtopics of a report, much as a table of contents does:

> **The history of the study of cavitation is surveyed. The necessary preconditions of cavitation are discussed, and cavitation initiation is presented. Cavitation collapse and bubble oscillations are then considered. Finally, some of the effects of cavitation are explored.**

An *informative abstract* is much more useful. It states the problem, briefly explains how the investigation was conducted, and mentions important conclusions and recommendations.

> **The Fine Point Jewelry Company withdrew their advertising from *Suburban Life* magazine on the grounds that the stories in it were not of the type to appeal to readers who would buy their jewelry. A study by Muller (1942) indicates a positive correlation**

between the socioeconomic status of magazine readers and the socioeconomic status of the characters they generally read about. An analysis of the stories appearing in *Suburban Life* for the past year showed that the characters were largely from the international set rather than from suburban areas and were more often in the $100,000-a-year bracket than in the $10,000–$20,000 bracket. Thus our study indicates that *Suburban Life* is not appealing to the market that it was designed to reach. Interviews of a random sampling of subscribers support this conclusion.

An abstract is generally held to 100 or 125 words. If it is longer, it ceases to serve its purposes. Many companies type abstracts on index cards for filing in a central catalog. Other companies circulate a weekly bulletin composed entirely of the abstracts of reports published during the week. In some companies, top management personnel regularly see only these bulletins. Then if they want a report, they send for it.

A good abstract is also very useful to the company librarian, who is responsible not only for the reference library but also for the file of company reports. She cannot possibly read all the reports written in her company if it is of any size. But she can generally keep up with the abstracts. If she knows what is in a report, she can bring it to the attention of those to whom it may be useful. Thus she can give it wider circulation and increase its usefulness.

3. *The Summary*

Since very little can be said in 100 or 125 words, reports which contain more than a hundred pages usually require a summary in addition to an abstract. Introductory summaries serve a double purpose. They provide a reasonably complete resumé of a report for those who cannot read it all. They also help the person who *will* read the entire report. In any complex mechanism the function of individual parts is difficult to understand unless one understands the mechanism as a whole; thus the function of individual parts of a complex report may be difficult to follow unless one has obtained an overview of the entire report. A good summary provides such an overview.

Rules for the length of summaries vary. Some companies insist that they be held to one page. Others suggest that they should be from 2 to 5 percent as long as the report itself. A company's rules probably reflect the

kind and size of the typical report prepared for its executives and the ways in which it is used. Some companies find both abstracts and summaries useful.

A summary reproduces the main points of the report. It should be so written that it can stand alone. In long technical reports, and more frequently in technical books, a summary appears at the head of each chapter.

4. *The Table of Contents*

At about the same level of abstraction as the descriptive abstract is the table of contents. An outline of the report, it indicates major headings and subheadings. Occasionally it will even list sub-subheadings. Thus the reader may use it not only to find the various sections of the report but also to see how the report is organized. The table of contents almost always follows the abstract, but usually precedes the summary. It may be supplemented by special tables of contents for illustrations, figures, or charts.

5. *The Body of the Report*

The report itself is at the next level of abstraction. It supplies more detail than the abstract, summary, or table of contents. The first section of the body of the report is the *introduction,* which discusses the purpose and background of the study which has been made. It tells not only what the problem was and why the study was undertaken but also what limitations, if any, were imposed. Where relevant, it also includes a history of the problem, a short summary of earlier studies, a summary of the required technical background, and a definition of the way each important term will be used. When the report does not include a separate section on procedure, a brief discussion of it may also appear in the introduction. In short, the introduction should give the reader the background he needs to understand, evaluate, and use what follows.

About the *discussion section,* the heart of the report, we need say little. Everything said in the preceding chapter about organization is relevant here. Special attention should be devoted to the use of appropriate headings and subheadings to emphasize the organization of the material, as we have done in this book. Thus a reader who merely thumbs through a report looking at the headings is able to obtain a clear picture of the organi-

zation of the materials. In long reports where the subsections are long, the author can help the reader further by placing at the top of each page the title of the appropriate section or subsection.

A section devoted to *conclusions* or *recommendations,* or both, generally follows the discussion section of a report. Here all of the separate conclusions recorded in earlier sections are brought together, usually listed in decreasing order of importance. They may be analyzed briefly, if necessary, so that the reader who is interested *only* in the conclusions is not left with a mere listing which he must organize into a meaningful whole. The recommendations section indicates action that should be taken on the basis of the study being reported.

Certain reports may also call for a *bibliography,* which lists sources of information relevant to the study.

6. The Appendix

The appendix, always the final section, represents the next and lowest level of abstraction. Here the interested reader can find the wealth of detail which supports the writer's conclusions and recommendations. It may contain charts, graphs, tables, drawings, pictures, glossaries of terms, and any other materials required for a full understanding of the situation covered in the report. If it contains many items, the appendix should carry its own table of contents.

A perennial problem is how much of the supporting evidence (tables, graphs, and so on) should appear in the text and how much should be relegated to the appendix. The only valid generalization we can offer is that the text should be as uncluttered as possible. There are always special situations. One company president we know, who was originally an accountant, can read tables of statistics much more easily than prose. He complains continually that he doesn't get enough figures in his reports. His subordinates face an unusual hurdle—but one which they cannot ignore.

Most of us prefer to have generalizations presented to us in words. Short tables, of course, are often useful to a writer for buttressing arguments. But if he uses many of them, he will not only break up each page, making it hard to read, but also lengthen the report. By packaging a report so that his reader can examine text and appendixes at the same time, the author can move almost all such materials out of the text.

7. *The Distribution List*

The distribution list does not fit into the pattern that we have been describing. It is a device for directing the report to the proper readers and for letting everyone who sees the report know to whom it is being sent. If it is short, it may appear on the cover letter or memo, or on the title page. If it is long, it will probably appear at the end of the report, after the appendix.

Organizing an Effective Report

Thus a good report is built up in layers or levels of abstraction. The farther one gets into it, the more details he finds:

First level	Title
Second level	Abstract, or Summary, and Table of Contents
Third level	Body of Report
Fourth level	Appendixes

Or even:

First level	Title
Second level	Abstract and Table of Contents
Third level	Summary
Fourth level	Body of Report
Fifth level	Appendixes

Some specialized reports carry additional sections. These are easily fitted into the pattern described above. To determine where a section belongs one need only think of its purpose, its relation to the rest of the report, and the use to which it will be put.

Reports are best written backwards, that is, built up from the lowest level of abstraction. Before one begins to write, he will naturally have done a great deal of research. The information that he gathers will ultimately be presented in the appendix. When his data begin to take some form, he can start on the report itself. It is helpful to start planning the report before all research and experimentation has been completed; planning the report often brings to the surface significant gaps in thinking or in data. When all the materials have been gathered, the writer can begin on the body of the report in earnest. Then he can write the summary and, after that, the abstract. Some people save the highest level of abstraction, the title, for last, using only a working title while the report is in progress.

After a report is completed, the writer still has one more device for making sure that a particular reader does not miss any part of the report that may be especially useful to him. A cover letter summarizing briefly those aspects in which a particular reader will be most interested can direct him to the relevant passages. The writer should be sure, however, that he knows the recipient's interest well. It would be much better not to write such a letter at all than to direct him to materials in which he is not really interested or to cause him to skip over something important that he would have read had he examined the report for himself.

Inexperienced report writers frequently ask about the "proper" sequence for the sections of the report. There is no one best sequence. Every aspect of any communication is governed finally by the material to be communicated, the person or group communicating, the audience at which the communication is aimed, and the real purpose which it is designed to serve.

In one company, for example, the development laboratory has issued an instruction sheet for report writing which states that "an engineering report should contain most of the following elements, in the order listed":

1. Abstract (not more than 50 words)
2. Summary of report
3. Statement of problem
4. Analysis of critical elements
5. Analysis of possible approaches
6. Statement and justification of approach selected
7. Experimental technique employed
8. Experimental data obtained
9. Results of experiments
10. Analysis of results
11. Appendixes

The research laboratory of the same company organizes its reports in this way:

1. Synopsis
2. Introduction
3. Conclusions, or Summary
4. Recommendations
5. Experimental procedure
6. Results
7. Discussion
8. Appendixes

A section of the company's computer department issues the following instructions:

1. Title page, including a one-sentence description of the report
2. Table of contents, generally reserved for reports of 25 pages or more
3. Body of report

   The format for the body of the report is left to the option of the writer; however, the following principles are to be employed. Our reports will be read and acted upon by men who will probably not have time to delve personally into the details of the report but may wish to assign subordinates to do so. Therefore, the report should be divided into three parts.

   A. Abstract, one-half page or less

      The abstract should contain enough information so that the executive, if he so desires, can take action without reading the rest of the report.

   B. Text

      The purpose of the text is to explain in detail to someone who is an experienced engineer (but not necessarily an expert in the subject of the report) the nature of the problem and its solution. Since we work closely with other organizations, this section should acknowledge the help of persons in other groups who have contributed to it.

   C. Appendixes

      These should contain sufficient supporting information so that all the work reported may be checked.
4. Distribution list

One of the major automobile companies suggests that its technical report writers follow this outline:

INTRODUCTORY SECTION
- Title Page
- Preface
- Table of Contents

SUMMATION SECTION
- Subject
- Object
- Conclusions
- Recommendations

TECHNICAL SECTION
- Parts or Materials Tested
- Apparatus
- Procedures

Results
Discussion
GRAPHIC-AIDS SECTION
Tables of Data
Curves
Drawings
Photographs
SUPPLEMENTARY SECTION (APPENDIX)
References
List of Symbols
Sample Calculations

The company's technical-report manual recommends this general organization "for major, minor, and one-page reports," but adds that the "length and complexity of the report will determine how many of the headings [should be used]."

Another major producer of automobiles recommends: a preface, if necessary; a table of contents; a list of illustrations; and the body of the report, which should include an introduction, conclusions (recommendations or findings), a discussion, and appendixes, in that order.

Such different instructions even within one company do not necessarily mean disagreement about what makes a good report. They indicate rather differences in material, purpose, or audience. What is just right for one department or company may not be quite right for another. Each, therefore, works out a format which will be effective for the particular type of reporting it does.

Packaging Reports

Packaging is also important. Most reports are bound, the various sections following each other in order. But such packaging can discourage a reader unnecessarily. Looking at a report half an inch thick, he may not realize that the body is only six pages long and that the rest is appendix. The normal reaction is to resist what looks like an endless job. A good report is likely to be slighted or ignored if the reader's initial impression is adverse. Furthermore, in a report bound like a book it is difficult to check facts or figures in the appendix while examining the text. Being forced to flip pages back and forth in order to compare text and data can be most exasperating.

There are several ways out of this dilemma. A report folder with a pocket on each inside cover (Fig. 1) can be used. The report itself may be

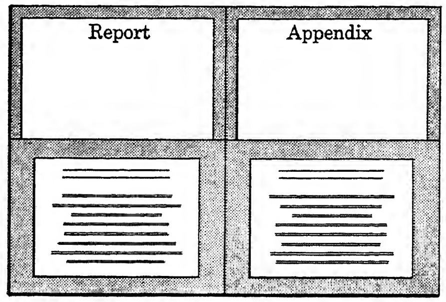


FIG. 1

placed in the left pocket, the appendix in the right. When the reader opens it up, he sees immediately that the body of the report does not bulk very large. After removing the text and appendix from the pockets, he can lay them out on the desk and use them together without inconvenience. If the pockets are deep enough, an appropriate table of contents for the report, and another for the appendix, can be pasted on them.

Another version of this folder has diagonal pockets which form a reverse V at the center fold (Fig. 2). This type is particularly useful for a

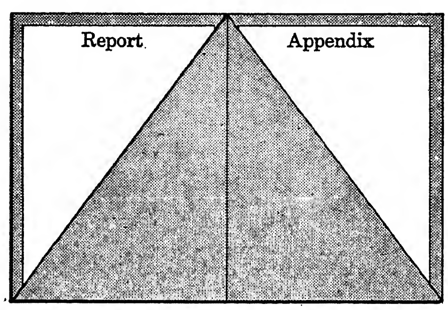


FIG. 2

personally submitted proposal or bid. Open, its appearance is attractive, and the writer can easily pull out specific portions of the appendix (photographs, perhaps, or graphs) which he needs while talking to his client.

Report and appendix can also be separated by stapling the text to the top of one inside cover and the appendix to the top of the other (Fig. 3). A person who reads while traveling or who customarily examines several

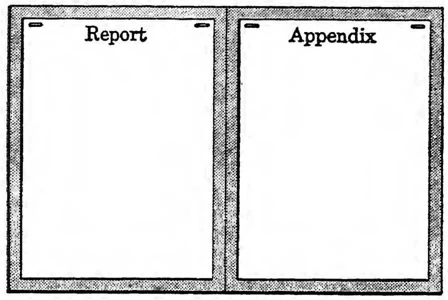


FIG. 3

reports at the same time may prefer this package. The sections cannot fall out or get mixed up, and the reader may move simultaneously through text and supporting appendixes.

A fourth method requires a three-panel folder instead of the usual two (Fig. 4). The text is bound between the first two panels in book fashion,

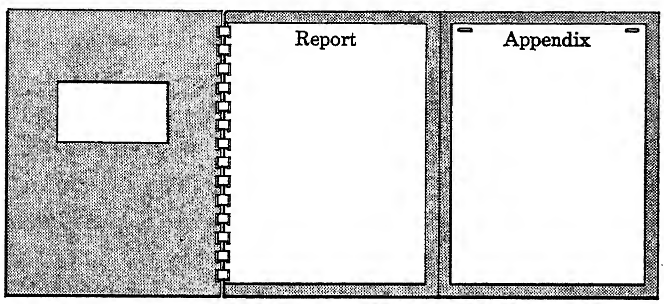


FIG. 4

either with staples or with a spiral plastic comb. The appendix is stapled to the top of the third panel, which may be folded in under the text when the report is not being used. Here too, the text is separated from the appendix, and they may be used together conveniently.

Sections of long reports can be marked for easy reference by inserting labelled dividers which extend beyond the right-hand margin or by attaching a gummed tab to the right-hand margin of the first page of each section.

Improving Reports

Report writers are showing more and more ingenuity in communicating their information. The research laboratory of one company, for ex-

ample, recently introduced magazinelike spreads of pictures in their annual report to highlight certain parts of their story. The technique was so successful that they plan to use it more extensively in their next report. The head of the laboratory explained his interest in such matters by saying, "Our only product is reports. If we don't produce readable ones, we'll go out of business." His attitude has spread through his department with excellent results.

The attitude of supervisors is very important. Not only can they impress their subordinates with the value of good reports, but they can also help them to prepare good reports. If management complains of poor reports but supervisors encourage their men to turn out reports rapidly so that they may move on to the next job, the men find themselves in an impossible situation, because, as we have just seen, the report may be the major—if not the only—product produced.

Management also can take active steps to improve reports. The head of one development department, concerned because his men were not writing enough reports, decided to make reporting easier by breaking it down into steps. Accordingly, he set up three methods of communicating engineering information: information statements (nicknamed Infos), engineering memoranda, and engineering reports. Infos are brief notes about interesting developments which occur while a project is being worked on. They do not have to be approved, have no special format, should not take much time to prepare, and are distributed only within the department. Engineering memoranda are informal engineering reports distributed within the development department and to selected engineering personnel in the operating divisions. Written periodically (although not necessarily at regular intervals) during an investigation, they generally include some of the following:

1. A statement of the problem
2. The approach taken
3. Results of experiments
4. Preliminary conclusions
5. Possible applications
6. Future work planned

The engineering report, written when a project is completed, is a formal technical report which tells the whole story and has all the customary paraphernalia.

The development department manager felt that by encouraging his engineers to begin with Infos, which they could dictate, which were rela-

tively short, and which required no red tape, he could help them get started. Several Infos would lead up to a memorandum, and the memoranda on a project would give engineers a big start toward writing a formal report.

A supervisor can also make it routine for new or relatively inexperienced subordinates to discuss a report with him briefly before writing it. A young man (or young woman) just entering the business world has little conception of where reports go or how they are used. With no real understanding of his audience, he cannot write for them even if he understands that he should do so. Instead he tends to set his ideas down as he would organize them for his own use. Needless to say, the result is inadequate communication. If the supervisor will devote a few minutes to describing the persons to whom a report is going, their positions, and what they will want to know, the young writer will be encouraged to write for those persons. After several brief discussions with the supervisor, he should be able to prepare good reports. But the instruction must begin before the report is written, rather than after. Once the writer has begun to put material on paper, he will inevitably tend to interpret well-meant suggestions as unfavorable criticism.

Using the positive approach—helping a man to do a job properly instead of correcting him after he makes mistakes—will save time and energy for both the supervisor and the writer, establish a better relationship between them, and save money for the company. The same results may be obtained from discussions between a supervisor and an experienced writer who has taken a new job.

Convinced of the economy of preventing rather than curing error, one supervisor regularly sits down with each subordinate who is about to start work on a report. Together they draw up a tentative distribution list. As each name is added to the list, the supervisor mentions his position and the reasons why he may be interested in the completed report. Thus he establishes a painless routine for insuring the necessary discussion of the audience without giving the impression that he is "riding herd" on his subordinates.

Management, then, may establish a favorable environment and sound procedures which produce good report writing; on the other hand, it may unknowingly cause poor report writing. One irate division manager showed us a report which could only be called a monstrosity. It was three inches thick. It had no table of contents, no appendixes, no summary—nothing to help the manager find his way through it. In order to get anything out of it, he would have had to read the whole report, an eight- or ten-hour job.

When we talked with him, he was going to fire the writer of the report. But after a little investigation, we had to tell him that he would have to shoulder at least part of the blame.

Several months before, he had called his department heads together and told them that the company might profit by securing a license to produce in the United States a new building material developed in England. He asked each of them to write a report on the effect that obtaining the license would have on the operations of his department. One department head was assigned, in the manager's words, to "coordinate" the various reports and "pull them together." When they arrived, the coordinator didn't know quite what to do with them. Though some of them overlapped, as a group they did not give a complete picture. There were big gaps, some of which he tried to fill by inserting materials that he obtained from the licenser in England. These supplied much of the missing information; but since they were designed for other purposes, they increased the overlapping. Furthermore, the English materials were on different levels of technical complexity: some were technical reports, some were technical news releases, and some were advertising brochures. Written over a period of five years, they sometimes presented conflicting information. The coordinator tried to fill some of the remaining gaps by writing several sections himself. When finally gathered between covers, the "report" was a massive collection of undigested materials.

Why was the division manager at fault? He had given the department head an impossible task. He had not asked the department head to write the report. (As he well knew, the busy department head had no time to do the whole job). He had asked him to "coordinate" the studies of a group of men at his own level. Understandably, the department head would have been reluctant to tear their reports apart and rewrite them, even if he had had time to do so. The result was a sorry compromise.

What should the manager have done? He should have selected a member of his staff, perhaps a young man with promise, given him time to *write* (not coordinate) the report, and asked the department heads to supply him with appropriate *materials* (not reports). Thus the writer, with adequate time to do this important job, could have shaped the materials into a meaningful, coherent study of the potential effect of adding the new product to the division's line.

The coordinator, of course, was also partly at fault. When he received the assignment, he should have said immediately that he would call a short planning session later at which each of the departmental heads would stake

out the area his material would cover. Thus the obvious gaps and overlappings, at least, would have shown up immediately and could have been eliminated. He should also have asked that each person include an informative abstract so that he could build an introductory summary, or write one. He should have provided a table of contents to guide the division manager through the report. He might also have provided tabs or sectional dividers. Even so, he would have put together a clumsy report, but at least he would have done his best with the time at his disposal.

Other Types of Business Communication

We have demonstrated above in some detail how the concepts we developed in earlier chapters can be applied to the formal report. We could apply the same approach to other forms of business communication which have not yet been discussed in any detail: memorandum reports, research memoranda; papers for professional societies and journals; articles for business and industrial magazines; engineering data letters; instruction manuals, specifications, maintenance standards; proposals. If we were to do so, however, we should have to cover much the same ground for each. The same basic principles apply to them all. The reader who understands these principles will have no difficulty in applying them to any type of communication he may have to prepare. Some of the illustrative materials which follow will help him to make these applications.

Illustrative Materials

1

Here are a set of guidelines for evaluating a report.* Developed by the staff of the General Motors Institute, they "are designed to assure uniform evaluation and to maintain a high uniform standard of quality":

* Charles L. Tutt, Jr., "Preparation and Evaluation of an Industrial Report," *General Motors Engineering Journal,* July–August–September 1957, p. 32.

Evaluation of the Report

TECHNICAL EVALUATION	REPORT EVALUATION

Total Report

Does total report:
- Fulfill original objectives?
- Cover all points essential to the main purpose of the assigned report?
- Is each part of the report in proportion to the complexity or significance of the corresponding parts of the assigned report?

Does total report have:
- Information arranged and presented in a sound and effective manner?
- A suitable title page giving essential information?
- A table of contents and list of illustrations which are complete, accurate, and easy to understand?

Preface

Does preface:
- Explain the assigned report accurately?
- Explain any change from the original objective during the development of the report?
- Give an accurate account of the work experience related to the assigned report?
- Acknowledge the help of those who contributed to the preparation of the report?

Does preface:
- Explain the reasons which gave rise to the selection of the report assignment?
- Give a clear account of work experience relating to the assigned report?
- Make acknowledgments in proper form: name, title and type of aid?

Introduction

Does the introduction:
- State the problem so that it corresponds with the objectives?
- Give the main steps of the procedure accurately?

Does the introduction:
- Give enough background information so that the nature of the report is easily understood?
- State the problem clearly and without ambiguity?
- Make clear the main steps in the procedure?

TECHNICAL EVALUATION | REPORT EVALUATION

- State the specific purpose of the report?
- Present the order of discussion for the remainder of the report?

Conclusions

Are conclusions:
- Significant, pertinent, and valid?
- Substantiated by the data presented in the report?
- Appropriate to the assigned report?
- Supplemented by a summary of findings and recommendations when necessary?

Are conclusions:
- Identified by an opening statement?
- Grouped with general before specific conclusions?
- Presented by including page numbers of substantiating text or grouped according to sections of the text so that the reader can locate substantiating data for any statement?
- Accurately grouped and labeled as conclusions, recommendations, or findings?
- Presented in lists, charts, graphs, or other suitable means of summarizing?

Main Discussion

Does main discussion:
- Describe any tests, equipment, or procedures used with sufficient completeness and accuracy so that the reader could use the information as a guide to a similar problem?
- Give specific sources of all information?
- Give complete and exact figures for all results and omit inexact information such as "many," "few," and "more"?

Does main discussion:
- Identify the area to be considered?
- Indicate the order in which each section is arranged?
- Explain clearly how data were gathered, processed, and interpreted?
- Relate data clearly to the conclusions reached?
- Give exact source of information in proper form, including footnotes and bibliography when

TECHNICAL EVALUATION

- Use technical terminology accurately?

REPORT EVALUATION

needed?
- Use precise language?
- Develop the discussion in a logical and clear order so that the material is easily usable?
- End with a summary or grouping of conclusions developed in the section?

Illustrations

Are illustrations:
- Provided when necessary as determined by the nature of the data or discussion?
- Consistent in quality with the text discussion?
- Accurate in their interpretation?
- Sound in the techniques used?

Are illustrations:
- Referred to in the text?
- Placed near text reference?
- Reproduced properly?
- Clearly numbered and labeled?
- Used when desirable as a summary device?

Appendix

Does the appendix:
- Contain essential supporting or supplementary material?
- Contain all material which belongs there?

Does the appendix:
- Contain appropriate material?
- Have a usable arrangement?

English

Is the English:
- Accurate in following the conventions of language?
- Clear, precise, and readable?

2

Under the title "Office and Lab Need Closer Tie," Chemical and Engineering News *reported the results of a survey on how management thinks research reports could be improved*:*

* Reprinted from *Chemical and Engineering News,* 36 (January 20, 1958), 38. Copyright 1958 by the American Chemical Society and reprinted by permission of the copyright owner.

Research reports are helpfully criticized by almost all who answered the survey. Better conclusions, more stress on long-term implications of results, and more attention to dollar and marketing value of findings seem the most serious needs. Management would also like other improvements such as shorter reports, more use of graphic material, better English, and more effort to write in layman's language.

An official of a drug company says, "The greatest basic need is for more concise reports in which conclusions and recommendations are clear, and basic data can be reviewed readily when necessary." And a chemical man adds that he would like "to develop better understanding by the laboratory worker as to just why he is working and what are his specific objectives." A similar view is voiced by the executive who thinks research people need to understand the commercial aspects of their work better, and should be able to interpret its relation to the company's goals.

Another management man sums up his feelings by saying, "Lab reports are too detailed and fail to give a standard against which progress can be measured. Unfortunately, they merely recite steps taken and difficulties run into without trying to evaluate actual progress against planned progress."

If they are available to you, examine several industrial reports:
a. Could they be improved by the methods suggested in the first paragraph?
b. Do they indicate that the people who wrote them understood the needs of the people to whom they were sent?
c. Do they "give a standard against which progress can be measured"?
(A good source for sample reports is Reports for Science and Industry, *by Margaret D. Blickle and Kenneth W. Houp. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1958.)*

3

Here are the opening paragraphs and headings of the subsequent sections of two communications on the same subject by the same authors. The first is a Conference Paper presented before the American Institute of Electrical Engineers (CP 57–883). The second is an article in Electrical World.*

* We are grateful to the authors for permission to use their material from the Conference Paper. The article is reprinted from *Electrical World,* March 24, 1958. Copyright 1958, McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, Inc.

Selecting Criteria for Transient Stability in System Planning

By B. L. Lloyd and C. A. DeSalvo

Westinghouse Electric Corporation

Many power companies today have smaller margins than ever before between normal operating conditions and transient stability limits. This is a natural evolution from the constant efforts to decrease operating costs. The search for economy has resulted in larger concentrations of power in single generating stations and heavier transmission circuit loadings. The problems of analyzing and evaluating system transient swings are also becoming more complex because of the modern trend to establish and make maximum use of inter-company ties. These changing aspects of system design and operation merit a continuing careful evaluation of the criteria used for judging the adequacy of the transient performance of a system.

This paper does not attempt to define rigid criteria for evaluating the transient performance of any particular system. The variation in system parameters, operating methods, and philosophy among the various power companies are too diverse to make such a generalization realistic. Rather the intent is to discuss some facets of the more important considerations faced by the system design engineer in developing these criteria and to illustrate the significance of each of the considerations, with the hope of developing some guides which will be of assistance to planners in reaching reasonable design criteria for transient stability.

Evaluation of System Transient Stability Requires Consideration of Three Criteria

By B. L. Lloyd and C. A. DeSalvo

Most important criteria for determining whether a system will show satisfactory transient stability, plus suggested conditions which should be used, are:

1. Severity and type of assumed disturbance. A 3-phase fault at a critical location should be used.
2. Operation of protective equipment. An additional contingency should be assumed, such as failure of first-line relaying or unsuccessful reclosure of faulted line.
3. System conditions preceding the disturbance. Stability studies should be based on the load level (heavy or light) which results in the more critical case. All transmission equipment should be assumed to be in service, with one generator down if this substantially reduces the stability limits of the system.

These test conditions reflect a basically conservative philosophy. They may be criticized as being too severe. In general, a disturbance of extreme severity may seem unreasonable because of the low probability of its occurrence simultaneously with the additional contingency selected. The assumed conditions probably may never occur; however another set of conditions, almost as bad, probably will occur. Thus, it is desirable to pick conditions severe enough so that even if they do not occur, the test of stability will demonstrate the capability of the system to ride through unforeseen emergency conditions which probably will occur.

Severe Criteria Justified
Transient Condition Analyzed
Investigate Load Conditions
Do Not Upset Balance
Assign Sum of Inertias
General Rules Applicable
Generator Behavior Described
Rotor May Be Damaged

The editor of Electrical World *placed the opening paragraph of the AIEE paper in a special box as an eye-catcher with the heading "Why Transient Stability Should Be Re-evaluated."*

a. *Why are the opening paragraphs of the two pieces different?*
b. *Why did the editor of* Electrical World *box the opening paragraph of the AIEE paper and set it off by itself instead of using it as the first paragraph of the article?*
c. *Do the section headings suggest that the pieces were developed in the same way?*
d. *Here is a portion of the summary of the AIEE paper. Compare it with the opening paragraph of the article in* Electrical World. *What are the similarities? What are the differences? What are the reasons for the differences?*

. . . the authors would like to express their opinions on some general guides which we hope will be of assistance in formulating criteria for a particular system.

First, for system conditions preceding the disturbance. Since both heavy-load and light-load conditions exist for an appreciable part of the day, we feel that the stability studies should be based on the load level which results in the more critical case. It seems reasonable to assume that all transmission equipment is in service, with perhaps one generator down if this substantially lowers the stability limits.

The most difficult decision concerns the severity of the assumed fault. The authors believe that a three-phase fault at a critical location should be used as a criterion because these faults *do* occasionally occur. Further, the authors feel that an additional contingency should be assumed. This contingency might be failure of first-line relaying and reliance on back-up, unsuccessful reclosure of the faulted line, double-circuit faults, etc. A disturbance of this severity may seem unreasonable because of the low probability of simultaneous occurrence of the three-phase fault in a critical location coupled with the additional contingency selected. The authors readily concede that the assumed conditions probably will never occur; however, another set, almost as bad, probably will occur. In other words, pick a condition severe enough so that even if the assumed conditions do not occur, the test will demonstrate the capability of the system to live through the unforeseen emergency conditions which probably will occur at some future time.

4

This is an outline for an instruction manual:*

* Warren H. Deck, "What Makes the Good Instruction Book?", *General Electric Review* (July 1955), 41.

Cover
Title page
Contents
Introduction
Receiving, handling, storage
Description
Installation
  Location
  Mounting
  Connections
  Adjustments and tests
Operation
  Operating limits
  Initial operation
  Operating procedure
Principles of operation (for unfamiliar complex equipment)
Maintenance
  Inspection
  Servicing
  Lubrication
  Repair and replacement
Trouble-shooting
Overhaul
  Special tools
  Disassembly
  Cleaning
  Inspection
  Testing
  Repair
  Replacement
  Lubrication
  Reassembly
Renewal parts (in a separate book for complex equipment)

For specific components, such as a motor starter, an abridged outline can be used. . . .

Description
  Magnetic contactor
  Overload relay

Installation
- Remove packing
- Clean magnet surfaces
- Select heater size
- Check movement of armature
- Mounting
- Connections

Maintenance
- Cleanliness
- Removal of coil
- Removal of contacts
- Changing contacts from normally open to normally closed
- Replacing stationary contact support

a. *Who reads instruction manuals?*

b. *How are they used?*

c. *Does this manual contain all the information that such people would need?*

d. *How would you evaluate the manual's organization?*

5

This discussion will be helpful to anyone who writes for a technical periodical. Are there any significant differences between the instructions given here and those we have given for writing reports?*

Though the article you write is aimed at a specific reader, this in itself will not assure publication. The manuscript still has to fulfill the editorial requirements of the magazine. The editorial requirements usually are defined by several concepts that are almost always headed by the "relevancy" or "reader-value" concept.

Where *relevancy* is concerned, the editor usually asks: Does it concern the industry we serve? Is the material relevant to our editorial program? The philosophy of relevancy goes about like this: It doesn't do anybody—the reader, the publication, the author, or a company—much good to have an article appear in a magazine that doesn't reach the greatest number of people interested in the subject and the particular treatment given to the subject.

* Courtesy of Westinghouse Electric Corporation. From *Before You Write,* by H. C. McDaniel, Director, Technical Information.

When the manuscript is being tested for *reader value,* the questions go about like this: Is the subject of interest and value to our readers? Does it give them new, additional, or different information about an older subject? Does the article define and/or solve a problem? Will the technique or development be directly useful to our readers? Reader value is a key question. Its importance stems from the fact that technical magazines have built their reputations over the past decades on the usefulness of their editorial content. Today, more than ever, they must adhere relentlessly to this concept, for their readers are people who must put their knowledge to good use in solving everyday problems.

Timeliness is another concept of great importance. Is it new? Does the manuscript describe a new technique or development of significance to the industry we serve? Does the article deal with a problem of current interest? The underlying thought here is this: Progress is paced by development—development of new materials and machines, processes, and techniques. Therefore, if the technical magazine is to serve the professional needs of its readers it must bring them the latest developments, not something already known throughout the industry.

An extremely useful concept at times is *interest* range. How many readers will be interested? Can the material be presented in such a manner as to attract the attention of a fair share of our readers? Is the subject of broad interest? Or, is the material too specific for our audience? The philosophy here is one of maximum value for the greatest number of readers. That's usually a basic yardstick of all magazines. No magazine can afford to publish an article that will attract only 3 percent of its readers when it already has waiting for publication an article that will draw the attention of 75 percent of its readers.

Another extremely important concept is *accuracy*. Are the statements supported by facts? Is the article factual, impartial? Technical magazines have a major obligation to their subscribers to make certain that nothing misleading is printed. Claims must be backed up by facts. Any unusual statement must be so well explained and supported by facts that readers will accept its veracity. Readers are interested in facts far more than in claims.

Manuscripts must on occasion be tested for *duplication*. If this is not a new process or technique, does the information add to the literature? Or, does it complement or duplicate material recently published or planned for future publication? No editor is going to jeopardize his reputation for

being there first-with-the-newest by accepting material that is as old as yesterday's newspaper.

Other check points are:

Completeness. Does the manuscript contain all essential information needed to present the techniques or developments?

Then there is *structure.* Is the manuscript well-organized? Does it follow the progression of cause and effect? Is the information presented in a clear and terse manner?

And finally, there are *visual aids.* Do illustrations support the central theme of the article?

6

For those who find it necessary to use statistics in tabular form, the following discussion will be helpful.*

Tabular presentation as an end-product. Since it represents the culmination of a long series of census or survey operations, tabular presentation can only reflect the results of the previous stages. Even though planned in advance, statistical tables cannot be completed until after the census or survey-planning, questionnaire-designing, enumerating or transcribing, coding, card-punching, and tabulating operations have been completed. However, the published tables, and their accompanying text, tend to be the only results of the expenditure of effort, time, and money which the using public sees; hence the user's evaluation of all operations tends to be based on the final step, that is, on the statistics as presented. In itself, this makes sound presentation vitally important. Good presentation transmits the quality of the previous operations and, in turn, assists in making clear the meaning of the material. Poor presentation not only fails to clarify the data, it tends to impair or destroy the effect of the work that has gone before.

Basic objective. In the design and preparation of statistical tables the basic objective is to arrange and present data in such a way that their meaning and significance can readily be grasped by the user.

In this respect, the statistical table represents a compromise, rather than a solution. It is an efficient, but by no means an ideal, way of presenting data, and its usefulness increases with multiplicity of classification. It must be remembered, however, that many potential, and even actual, users

* From *The Bureau of Census Manual of Tabular Presentation*, prepared by Bruce L. Jenkinson (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1949), pp. xi–xiii.

of statistical tables do not find it easy to understand columns and rows of figures. This is the group about whom the table designer should be most concerned, rather than about his more experienced colleagues. It follows that table design should be kept as simple as possible, taking into account the subject matter and available space. This need not penalize users who are statisticians since they find simplicity in presentation a decided convenience. It is extremely important, however, to those who may have an equal need for the data but have difficulty in reading tables of any kind.

The dividing line between good and bad presentation may best be determined by the answer to the question: "Which method is simple, focuses the reader's attention on the data (rather than on the form), and makes clear the meaning and significance of the information?" That which clarifies the meaning of the statistics and concentrates the attention upon them is good presentation; that which obscures the meaning of the data or distracts the attention from them is poor presentation.

Fundamental approach. Tabular design must be approached from the standpoint of the user rather than from that of the producer. It is not enough that the table be clear to the designer, who necessarily has an intimate knowledge of the statistics and their qualifications. The imperative requirement is that the table be clear to the user; that is, the table must be so designed that the user will be able to obtain from it that which he wishes and needs to know, so far as the desired information is present. Conformity with this requirement is not always simple since it is difficult for the table designer to discount his own knowledge and review his own work through the eyes of the using public. Yet that task must be performed if the purpose of the table is to be achieved.

Nature and significance of style. Style in tabular presentation consists of the distinctive or characteristic mode of presentation or construction determined upon as satisfactory by the producer of the statistics. In general, it refers to the aggregate of practices and methods; in particular, it refers to the precise way of doing things prescribed by, or agreed upon within, a given organization. The significance of style lies primarily in its influence in simplifying the production of statistics and in facilitating their understanding when produced.

In terms of production, style consists of the great body of usual practices common to any large organization and essential to any large-scale operation. In this respect it is merely another name for "custom."

The role of style as an aid to the understanding of the data is frequently overlooked. By promoting uniformity in the treatment of many

details, it builds up an attitude of "normal expectation" on the part of the reader. This tends to remove from the reader's notice many points of minor detail which may distract him from the content of the table if they are forced on his attention by unaccountable variation.

This development of "normal expectation" can be capitalized upon by the producer of statistics. If "differences" which have no meaning are scrupulously avoided, the reader is far more likely to note and respect those real differences which can only find expression in the change of a single word in a phrase, or in a shift in the terminal point of a column rule.

Style is rigid only in that it should be followed unless there is a sound analytical or mechanical reason to the contrary. It is not properly a barrier to useful development and change. It is, and should be, a barrier against unnecessary, unwarranted, or capricious variation.

Comparative roles of content and mechanics. The purely mechanical aspects of tabular presentation, although important, can be overemphasized. Mechanics must be consistently thought of as a tool of presentation, not as an end in itself. Proper attention to mechanical style and form is essential, but forcing statistics into a rigid physical pattern, or an overreliance upon mechanical tricks, can easily defeat the whole purpose of presentation.

In the last analysis the only purpose of mechanics in this field is to help in making clear to the reader the significance of the data presented; that is, the content of the table. The following statements may aid in clarifying the comparative roles of content and mechanics:

1. The point of departure for both content and mechanics is the meaning and significance of data.
2. Content is the reason for the table's existence; mechanics merely translates requirements of content within physical limits.
3. Content determines inclusion and relative placement of data; mechanics assists in presentation of content by means of typing, drafting, and printing aids.
4. Content poses problems of space; the function of mechanics is to solve them in a fashion which aids in, rather than detracts from, the presentation of content.
5. Content is limited by space only in terms of the amount to be presented, never in terms of the meaning of the data. Mechanics is limited by space in terms first of preserving or enhancing meaning, and second by rigid physical and operational requirements.
6. Content is restricted by mechanics only so far as mechanical limi-

tations add to, or detract from, the presentation of meaning. Mechanics is completely bound by content since a perfect physical pattern fitting the space is useless if meaning is impaired or destroyed.

7

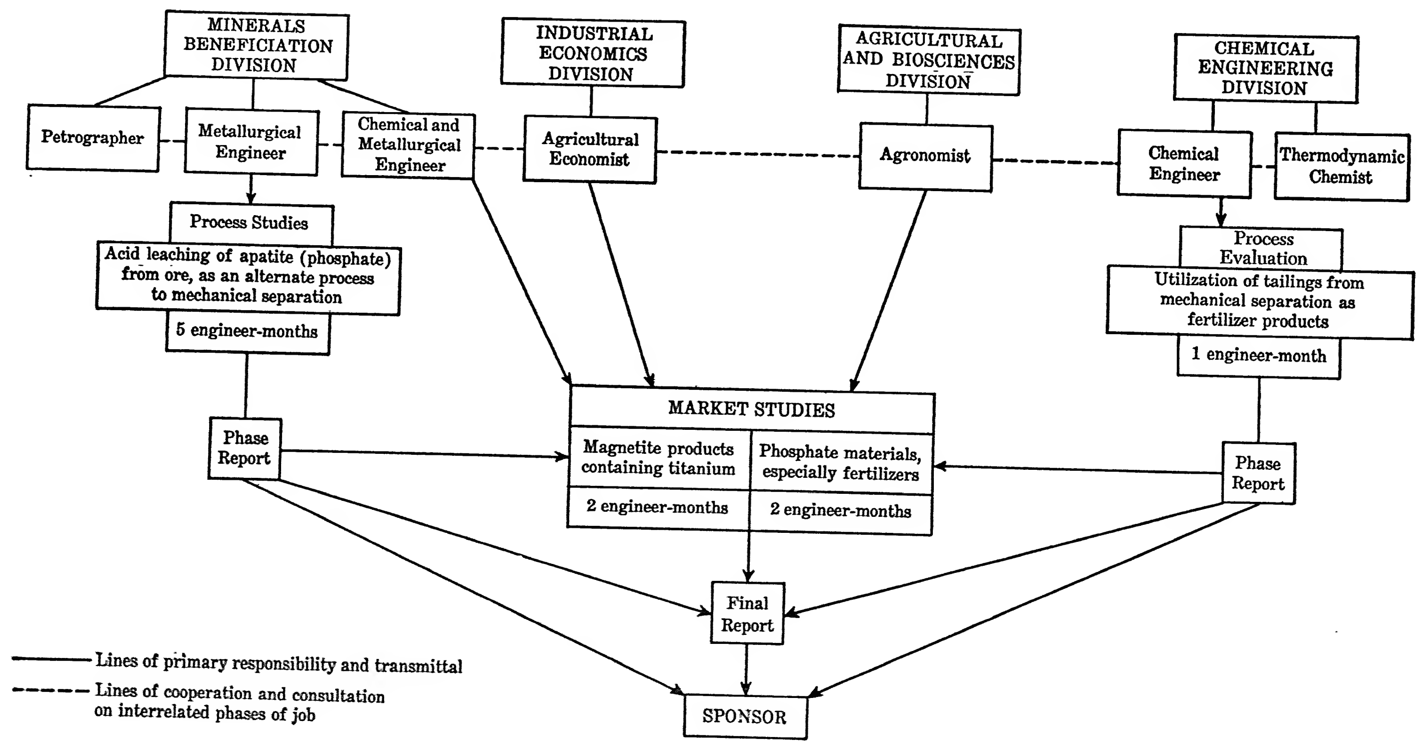
Here is a discussion and a chart of how the talent at the Batelle Memorial Institute was organized to write a group of reports for an ore-manufacturing company:*

Team research admittedly presents some problems that are not encountered in the individual-research method. Chief among these are the achievement of a unified and well-coordinated research effort among the team members in the execution of the study, and a coherent presentation of the results of the various aspects of the study.

The attainment of a unified effort in carrying out a study involving a diversity of problems requires the services of a competent coordinator or project leader. He must be thoroughly familiar with the over-all objectives of the study, must have a working knowledge of the present technology and economic status of at least one of the major facets of the total research problem, and must have a general understanding of the problems involved in all the aspects of the study. Under the guidance of such a coordinator, the individual segments of the study can be effectively carried forward by experts in those particular fields and such other personnel as may be drawn into the study to assist them with necessary "legwork."

This same coordinator must carry the major responsibility for the preparation of a coherent final report on the project. The analysis and writing up of results in the several segments of the study may be done by different individuals responsible for those segments. However, the job of pulling together the various sections of the report, of arranging them in a logical sequence and providing a smooth transition between them, and finally of preparing the over-all summary and conclusions rests squarely on the coordinator. Once this job is accomplished, the administrative or supervisory personnel responsible for the technical quality of the research project and the report provide a valuable check on the success of this coordination effort.

* Odin Wilhelmy, Jr., L. L. Lortscher, and G. F. Sachsel, "Team Research in Fertilizer Economics," *Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry*, 4 (November 1956), 922, 924. Copyright 1956 by the American Chemical Society and reprinted by permission of the copyright owner.


MINERALS BENEFICIATION DIVISION
INDUSTRIAL ECONOMICS DIVISION
AGRICULTURAL AND BIOSCIENCES DIVISION
CHEMICAL ENGINEERING DIVISION
Petrographer
Metallurgical Engineer
Chemical and Metallurgical Engineer
Agricultural Economist
Agronomist
Chemical Engineer
Thermodynamic Chemist
Process Studies
Acid leaching of apatite (phosphate) from ore, as an alternate process to mechanical separation
5 engineer-months
Process Evaluation
Utilization of tailings from mechanical separation as fertilizer products
1 engineer-month
MARKET STUDIES
Magnetite products containing titanium
2 engineer-months
Phosphate materials, especially fertilizers
2 engineer-months
Phase Report
Phase Report
Final Report
SPONSOR
Lines of primary responsibility and transmittal
Lines of cooperation and consultation on interrelated phases of job

a. *What are the advantages in having several people help to prepare a report?*
b. *How does the procedure described above prevent the type of report described in this chapter as a "monstrosity"?*

8

Here is an instruction sheet prepared for specification writers:

1. Use key words in the subject heading (for ease of indexing and filing).
2. Provide a short summary statement of the process to be described and the product to which it is to be applied.
3. Provide a general description of the type of equipment to be used; supply model numbers, if possible. (Do *not* go into detail about equipment.)
4. List the materials and the relevant material numbers.
5. List the numbers of the safe-practice data sheets according to which the product can safely be produced or processed.
6. Describe chronologically and in enough detail for the production line the step-by-step operations to be performed.
7. List the inspections to be made at each step to insure that the process is functioning properly.
8. List the inspections to be made at each step to insure that the process is producing the proper results.
9. Underline the critical operations and procedures necessary to insure quality, safety, etc.
10. List the final inspections necessary to determine acceptability.
11. Specify packaging and shipping requirements.
12. Provide references to any relevant specifications.

From the information asked for, can you tell how many different uses these specifications serve? List them.

9

Here is a conclusion about the nature of audiences with whom technical writers communicate:*

During a round-table discussion at a recent Technical Writers Institute sponsored by Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, the question came up as to

* John A. Miller, "Technical Writing for Middlebrows," *Public Relations Journal* (July 1958), 15.

the knowledge level that could safely be assumed for various audiences. The participants, who were all technical writers, agreed that the knowledge level for a general audience could be assumed to be that of a high-school graduate, while a mixed technical audience could be assumed to have the level of a college sophomore in science or engineering.

Examine some pieces of technical writing (reports, articles, manuals). Are they aimed at "a general audience"? At "a mixed technical audience"?

13. Writing to Persuade

Frequently in this book we have been dealing with writing designed to persuade. Now we should like to collect the various principles of persuasive writing which we have considered, add to them and extend them, examine the psychology behind them, and explore some of their implications which we have not yet considered. The general principles developed in this chapter will then be applied in Chapter 14 to the most common types of persuasive writing: the sales letter, which is designed to sell a product; the collection letter, which is designed to secure payment for products which have been sold; and claim and adjustment letters, which are designed in the one instance to secure correction of an error made by the recipient of the letter and in the other to satisfy a claim made by him.

Considering the Audience

Fred Peters of the Genung Manufacturing Company, whose letter opens Chapter 2 (p. 18), was certainly not persuasive. Peters' bad letter was not the result of his failure to use acceptable business prose. The real difficulty was caused by his prior failure to put himself in his reader's shoes. In one sense, Tom Smith, whose letter re-established relations between the companies involved, had an easier job than Peters did, because the audience for the letter that he had to write was vividly described in Tom Parsons' call report. The picture of Short Beach Chemical Company

executives quivering with indignation at the mention of Genung made it difficult for Smith *not* to consider his audience.

The Dawson-Turner correspondence later in Chapter 2 (pp. 25–28) provides another example of how assessing the audience enabled a letter-writer to turn an irritated correspondent into a satisfied customer. In the Illustrative Materials of the same chapter, John Gordon (p. 37) and the representatives of Chesebrough-Pond's (p. 38) also "considered the audience" successfully. The Lundberg-Lambert correspondence (p. 34) is an example of the lack of such consideration.

The first requirement, then, for writing a successful letter—and particularly for writing a successful persuasive letter—is to consider the audience.

Avoiding Pretentiousness

A second requirement is to write simply and informally whenever possible, avoiding pretentiousness. The materials in Chapters 3 (Wasteful Prose), 4 (Business Jargon), and 5 (Levels of Usage) are also relevant here. It is difficult to imagine the president of the Lofton Company, for example, writing a persuasive letter. His memo (p. 45) about Dr. Nash, the investment counselor, is so pompous that it is difficult to take him seriously. A "persuasive" letter couched in windy Lofton prose would be likely to persuade no one. Similarly, the Johnson memo (p. 80), the financial newsletter (p. 82), and the answer to a letter of inquiry (p. 83) lack the sincerity and conviction needed to secure the reader's confidence, without which persuasion is impossible. The same may be said of the examples of pseudo-formal writing in Chapter 5.

Starting Quickly

A rubber-stamp opening slows a letter down and suggests that the writer really didn't think about the reader and his problems when he dictated it. The opening paragraph of the following letter, for example, tells the reader little more than that the writer is about to answer his letter:

> Reference is made to your letter of April 2 about the 50 dozen shirts we are making for you. You asked if we could affix your labels to these shirts.
>
> We would prefer a label which included our name also . . .

Furthermore, the second paragraph begins by disagreeing with the reader's request. The writer would do well to approach the problem more directly.

> There are several methods of handling the labels that you mentioned in your letter of April 2. We could use your labels, we could use our labels, or we could design a special label, which would read:
>
> Manufactured Exclusively for
> Aurora Men's Shop
> Chicago, Illinois
> by
> Tailored-Wear, Inc.
>
> We will, of course, sew your regular labels on the shirts if you insist. But we feel that use of the special label would increase the sale of your shirts, especially since we are planning an extensive advertising campaign in the Midwest for the coming fall season.

The second letter begins to move immediately. Furthermore it suggests that the writer is efficient, flexible, and interested in the reader's problems as well as his own.

Starting Positively

Ineffective writers often begin a letter negatively:

> We are sorry to have to tell you that we had already shipped your order when your letter requesting an additional 13 cases arrived.

A positive opening would be much better:

> Thank you very much for your supplementary order. The original order was shipped two days ago. The 13 additional cases will leave here today, and the Johnson Trucking Company has promised that you will have all 32 cases by the 17th of this month.

If the writer of this letter had something else to say, particularly if he had an idea to sell, the recipient would be much more receptive to it if he had read the second opening paragraph.

Not long ago the development laboratory of a large manufacturing company found that it was having difficulty in obtaining the funds necessary to continue several important projects. After talking over the situation with various executives, the director of the laboratory discovered that management was convinced that the section involved was not able to solve the problems assigned to it. When he returned to his desk, he studied carefully the memoranda which the section had sent to management. The first one began:

> Unfortunately Project X-13 has not developed an alloy which will compete with Alumicop, recently marketed by the Franklin Specialty Corporation.

The second one began:

> Project BB-27 failed to discover a paint better suited for use on sales models than the one we are currently using.

The third one opened with:

> Project LD-2 no longer has sufficient funds to complete the tests required to provide significant data on moisture resistance.

No wonder management thought that the section personnel were incompetent.

Discussions with the section leader soon changed the negative approach. Future memoranda stressed what had been accomplished, not what had failed:

> Project X-13 has developed an alloy that is as light and durable as Franklin's recently marketed Alumicop. At the moment, however, it is 10% more expensive. The project engineer reports that an additional month of research will provide a fully competitive product.
>
> Project BB-27 demonstrated that the paint we now use on sales models is the best available.
>
> Project LD-2 is in sight of its goal. An unexpected increase in the cost of raw material depleted the funds appropriated for this purpose. The development laboratory requests an additional $2,600 to complete the tests planned.

The facts were the same, but the approach was different.

Nothing destroys the effectiveness of a persuasive letter or report faster than a negative approach. On the other hand, a positive approach will usually insure a sympathetic hearing.

The Importance of Proper Planning

Organization is as important in letters as it is in longer communications and the same process is required to achieve it. Mr. G. T. Stevens, for example, is faced with a difficult writing problem. He must refuse an invitation but maintain pleasant relations with the person and the group which invited him.

On October 21 Stevens received a call from Charles A. Rinton, president of The National Association of Hardware Wholesalers. Stevens understood from the conversation that Rinton was simply inviting him to attend the association's annual meeting on November 18, 19, and 20 and especially to attend a panel discussion on mowing equipment, a field which his company was planning to enter. Since several projects in which he was interested were likely to be in a critical stage in mid-November, Stevens was cordial but noncommittal about the invitation.

Ten days later a letter from Rinton reached Stevens' desk which clearly indicated that Rinton thought he had invited Stevens to be a member of the panel. The letter renewed the invitation and asked for a prompt reply. Stevens, who was in South America on a special assignment, did not return to his desk until November 6. On November 7, when he is finally able to get around to his most important mail, he has to answer Rinton's letter. A telephone call discloses that Rinton is himself on a business trip and will not return for two days. Stevens decides to write. An intelligent and thoughtful man, he uses an orderly procedure.

1. Determine Real Purpose

The meeting is less than two weeks away. Stevens cannot afford to alienate either Rinton or The National Association of Hardware Wholesalers. He may want to display his products at future meetings of the association, advertise products in its trade journal, and sell to its members. On the other hand, he knows little about the panel topic and does not wish to get his company's new venture off on the wrong foot. Furthermore, he has a very important meeting in Chicago on November 17 and may have to remain there until the late afternoon of the next day. Hence he must refuse—late as it is. But he must refuse in such a way that neither Rinton nor the association will be offended. In fact, he should, if possible, increase their good will toward his company. This is the real purpose of his letter,

2. Gather Materials

Stevens' first step is to recheck his calendar. As he thought, he is firmly committed to a conference on November 17 with representatives of the Dill Company, and they may insist on his staying over for an extra day. Even if he were prepared to speak on the panel's subject, he couldn't be sure of making the conference on November 18. So he jots down on his scratch pad "Chicago, Nov. 17," and then adds "H. C. Dill Company—overnight?" Underneath that, he writes "not enough exp. with mowers yet." Then he adds "can't cancel Chi.—too many people involved." Thinking about the Dill Company, he puts down also "imp. customer." Those are the facts. What else does he want to say? He must be gracious about the invitation, so he writes "flattered." He must also apologize for replying late, so he adds "apology—out of town—phone call, too."

3. Select Materials

Now he looks at his list:

Chicago, Nov. 17
~~H. C. Dill Co.~~—overnight?
not enough exp. with mowers yet
can't cancel Chi.—~~too many people involved~~
~~imp. customer~~
flattered
apology—out of town—phone call, too

There are some things he should not say. Calling the Dill Company "an important customer" might suggest that he considers the hardware wholesalers to be of lesser importance. Nor would there be much point in naming the Dill Company or in mentioning the number of people involved. Should he mention the Chicago trip at all? Probably so. That leaves:

Chicago, Nov. 17
H. C. Dill Co.—overnight?
not enough exp. with mowers yet
can't cancel Chi.—too many people involved
imp. customer
flattered
apology—out of town—phone call, too

4. Order Materials

How should he begin the letter? Probably by expressing his pleasure at being asked. So next to "flattered" he puts a *1*. Perhaps he should plead inexperience as his first excuse and buttress it by mentioning his date in Chicago. Alongside of his third item he puts a *2*. Then he draws lines connecting the first, second, and fourth items, and marks them *3*. The apology is last. He marks that *4;* and because he thinks he ought to mention his misinterpreting the phone call first, he marks "phone call" *a* (after crossing off the "too") and "out of town" *b*. His list then looks like this:

Chicago, Nov. 17
3 ~~H. C. Dill Co.~~—overnight?
2 not enough exp. with mowers yet
can't cancel Chi.—~~too many people involved~~
~~imp. customer~~
1 flattered
b a
4 apology—out of town—phone call, ~~too~~

5. Check against Purpose

The approach he has worked out looks good. Is there anything else? He not only wants to stay in Rinton's good graces, but he also wants to keep the door open for future invitations, so he adds a final item:

maybe next year

6. Write

Now he is ready to dictate. He calls in his secretary, and looking at his outline he dictates the following letter:

Dear Mr. Rinton:

I was flattered to learn from your letter of October 29 that you were not only inviting me to attend the coming meeting of the Association of Hardware Wholesalers, but also to participate in a panel discussion. And I owe you an apology both for misunderstanding you over the phone and for taking so long to answer your letter. I returned Monday from two weeks in South America. This morning I tried to call you, only to learn that you, too, have been away from your desk.

You may not know that we have only recently begun to consider manufacturing lawn mowers, so we don't have any practical experience with them yet. I'm afraid that my personal experience is confined to my weekly wrestling with an old Quick-Cut 720. Therefore, it would be presumptuous of me to accept an invitation to speak on that subject before your group, most of whom probably know much more about mowers than I do. As I told you over the telephone I want very much to attend the meetings, but my interest is in learning from those of your members who have had long experience with mowing equipment.

As it turns out, I may even be cheated out of that. I have a long-standing appointment in Chicago for the seventeenth which I can't cancel. I may have to stay overnight. If so, I won't be able to attend the panel, though I'll certainly be there for the later sessions.

By the time of your next meeting I might possibly have some contribution to make. We hope by then to have experience with trial models and the results on some experiments we began recently. One of our engineers is working on a new kind of motor that we hope will greatly reduce the weight of the rotary mower. I am sorry that I could not send this reply last week, for I know what a headache it is to set up panels.

I am looking forward with great interest to the meetings at Stafford Springs and to the opportunity to meet you and other members of the association.

Sincerely,

7. *Recheck against Purpose*

When his secretary brings in the typed letter, Stevens reads it carefully. Is the second apology in the last sentence of the next-to-last paragraph a little too much? Under the circumstances, probably not. After signing it, he tells his secretary to send it air-mail special delivery, so that Rinton will have as much time as possible to get someone to take his place.

As suggested in Chapter 11, this procedure may at first seem involved and time-consuming. In practice it is not. The first six steps (determining the real purpose, gathering the materials, clarifying one's own thinking, selecting the materials, ordering them, and checking against purpose) should take only a minute or two—three at the most. They might involve a 10-percent additional investment in time. Since an unplanned letter takes longer to dictate and is almost always a third longer than it needs to be, the careful planner always saves time in the long run. Even if planning did

mean more time, it would be worth it. Few businessmen hesitate to add two hundred dollars to two thousand already invested if the two hundred will insure the success of a project whose outcome is otherwise problematical. By the same token, no businessman should hesitate to add a minute or two to the ten or fifteen minutes he will probably spend dictating an important letter if the additional time will improve his "product" substantially.

The Psychology of Persuasion

Thus far our discussion of the importance of organization in persuasive writing has involved a common-sense approach. Recent research in the psychology of persuasion has provided us with some useful insights into the nature of the reader whom the persuasive writer must reach.* For example, psychological studies show that people seem to differ in the degree to which they think about what they read and in the strength of their desire to understand. Those with a strong desire to understand tend to think carefully about what they read and are not very persuadable. Thus research confirms what most of us have long suspected: that the man "with a mind of his own" is not very persuadable. For those with little desire to understand, the order of presentation (the organization of materials) is a very important factor in persuasion, particularly if the writer wants his reader to remain persuaded over a period of time.

Arousing the Need First

Should the writer of a sales letter first extol the virtues of his product and then persuade the reader that he can't get along without it? Research shows that the reader who is first convinced that he needs a product will absorb more of the information presented. A proper approach in a sales letter to housewives, then, might be:

> **Does your present upholstery shampoo soak your furniture clear through, leaving it uncomfortably damp for hours—even days? If it**

* Much of this research is summarized and many new findings are presented in the *Yale Studies in Attitude and Communication*, published by the Yale University Press. At the time of this writing, two volumes have appeared: Carl I. Hovland (ed.), *The Order of Presentation in Persuasion*, 1957, and Hovland and Irving L. Janis (eds.), *Personality and Persuasibility*, 1959.

doesn't, you are probably using an inflammable cleaner which is dangerous to have around the house. To use it safely, you have to drag your furniture outside. Either way, it's a mess.

Well, Soluol has changed all that. It's a completely safe, nonflammable cleaner that can be used on all colorfast fabrics. A foam, it rides on the surface and will not overwet the material.

Furthermore, you don't need to fuss with a separate applicator. Soluol comes in a handy plastic tube which doubles as a handle. All you do is screw the tube into the applicator head, squeeze gently, and out comes the foam. When the Soluol tube is empty, you simply unscrew it and screw in a new one. The refill costs no more than the can or bottle of messy or dangerous cleaner you are using now. Incidentally, you might also tell your husband about Soluol. It cleans car seats quickly and easily, whether they are fabric, vinyl, or leather. You'll probably want to buy two, one for him and one for you. You can get Soluol in department, drug, hardware, variety, and grocery stores, as well as at your supermarket.

Presenting the information in paragraphs two, three, and four first and then trying to show the housewife that she needed Soluol would be much less effective.

Communicating Desirable Information First

Studies also show that if one has both desirable and undesirable information to transmit, presenting the desirable information first increases the possibility that the audience will pay attention to and understand it. Offering the undesirable information first decreases that possibility. Thus the writer of the following letter made a serious mistake:

Mr. Franklin Carson, Sales Manager
Utility Products Company
700 Wolford Street
Brooklyn 29, New York

Dear Mr. Carson:

The plastic baby bottles that you sent with the other items for our inspection are not up to your usual standard of quality. The eight-ounce size has an extremely thin bottom which developed a hole in the center when we tested it. The four-ounce size is not uniform in color and failed our pressure test.

If we can have a modified exclusive on the bottle brushes, we will order 500 dozen. We would like to advertise them as a "SIMPSON

FIRST." Could you hold off making them available to other dealers until we have had a chance to advertise them?

The pyrex feeding dishes are fine. We'll let you know by the end of the week how many we will want.

Yours truly,
SIMPSON BABY PRODUCTS

G. A. FARENOL
Purchasing Agent

The opening paragraph of Mr. Farenol's letter certainly is not designed to put Mr. Carson in a pleasant frame of mind. If Carson has any alternative, Farenol is unlikely to get a "SIMPSON FIRST" on his bottle brushes. Nor is Carson's unhappiness likely to be alleviated by the final paragraph, which does not contain a firm order for the pyrex feeding dishes. As a whole the letter is likely to damage rather than improve relations between the two companies.

Giving Both Sides of the Argument

Research also shows that communications which contain both sides of an argument are often more persuasive than those which present only one side, that favored by the communicator. Unfavorable reaction to a one-sided presentation is especially common when the audience either favors the other side or is later given the argument of the other side. If a client tells an insurance agent that he is considering a policy from a competing company, the agent would be wise to include in any oral or written analysis some discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the competing policy. He must do so, of course, without giving the impression that he is being unfair to the other company; he must suggest that he has the client's best interest in mind.

When the writer or speaker is in a position of authority or respect, or is an expert in a particular area, studies indicate that he probably should present the arguments for his point of view first and then present the arguments against it. If he knows that the audience is already aware of his position, has thought about it, and is opposed to it, he probably should discuss the opposing arguments first. If, in this situation, he presents his

arguments first, the audience will concentrate on refuting each argument as it is presented.

If, however, he deflates the opposing arguments first, he may be able to make his own prevail. Thus if the chairman of a board of directors or the president of a company, in speaking at a meeting of the stockholders or in writing to them individually, wants to persuade them that a new proposal, about which they know nothing, should be adopted, he probably should present the arguments for the proposal first and then discuss the arguments against it. On the other hand, if the stockholders have already been exposed to the opposing point of view, and particularly if they seem to favor it, he would do better to discuss the opposing arguments first. Special circumstances may require variations of these techniques, but the general principles are applicable in a wide variety of situations.

Persuasion and Personality

Psychologists also have much to say about the conscious and subconscious levels of personality and how they affect the choices we make. Many of their findings are relevant to persuasive communication. Advertisers, of course, have begun to lean more and more heavily on psychological—and even psychoanalytic—techniques. Calling their work "motivational research," they use depth interviewing, focused group interviewing, and projective techniques (word association, sentence completion, and picture response)—all adaptations of psychological techniques and often applied for advertisers by psychologists themselves. They also use surveys of "informed opinion" and consumer attitudes, complex statistical analyses, and sophisticated devices like "scalogramanalysis" for dealing with qualitative data derived from public-opinion polls.

Whatever one thinks of motivational research, or more precisely whatever one thinks of the way its advocates employ its principles and the ends to which they employ them, the principles themselves are valid. Obviously most of us do not have either the time or the money—or perhaps even the inclination—to appeal to the practitioners of motivational research to help us with a particular sales letter, claim or adjustment letter, credit letter, collection letter, or letter of application. A look at some of the psychological principles underlying motivational research, however, will shed considerable light on persuasive communication, whether written or spoken, and

help us to do a better job of understanding and dealing with the various audiences we must concern ourselves with as we write letters and reports and deliver talks.

Psychologists have been telling us for years about our individual differences: our nervous systems differ, for example, as do our IQs; the sex drive varies from person to person, and so does the need for approval. But with all these individual differences, certain general propositions can be stated which describe people and the way they act and react. Every individual, for example, has certain needs, has a certain picture of himself (self-concept), and reacts in certain ways to the cultural pattern of every group to which he belongs. Anything that frustrates his needs, violates this self-image, or throws him into too sharp a conflict with the culture pattern of a group to which he belongs will inevitably hurt him. Since hurting him is generally not a very effective method of persuading him, the writer of a persuasive letter must be very careful to take these psychological principles into account.

Basic Needs

Anyone attempting to be persuasive should be aware of man's basic needs and how they motivate him. First, of course, comes the need to satisfy certain biological drives. Of these, we are most aware, perhaps, of hunger, thirst, and sexual tension. But there are also excretory and maternal tensions and the need for oxygen. These drives or tensions appear in the adult in many different patterns and proportions. The fact that they vary from individual to individual suggests one of the reasons why man_1 is not man_2 is not man_3, as we pointed out in Chapter 10, and that what may be persuasive with man_1 may irritate man_2 and leave man_3 cold.

Another important basic need is the need for security. People want to feel that they belong: hence the frequent appeal of companies to their employees to contribute to the efforts of "the team." Belonging makes man feel secure. So does status: hence the strong drive among young businessmen for promotion to a position carrying an impressive title, a handsomely appointed office—and a secretary. The man who "gets ahead" is able to display status symbols which suggest that he is secure. Others seek to be secure by putting their money into government bonds or mutual funds instead of investing in individual stocks. For the same reason they take out insurance and try to build a substantial bank account.

Learning to Satisfy Basic Needs

Man relieves his needs and the tensions they generate in various ways, depending upon the strength of each need and the means by which his particular culture pattern permits him to satisfy them. In certain parts of the world people satisfy their hunger primarily by eating fish, in others by eating rice, in still others by eating meat. There are differences within sub-cultures, too. In the culture pattern which we know as "western European civilization," the French tend to satisfy their thirst more often with wine than do the English, the Americans more often with carbonated drinks than do the Germans. Even within a single country there are marked differences. In some areas of the United States, hominy grits are a staple in the diet. In other areas they are virtually unknown.

Anyone in a position of responsibility today must be aware of these individual and cultural differences if he is to communicate persuasively. An American agricultural expert working in Asia, for example, found it extremely difficult to persuade the people of a village to forsake their old-fashioned methods of cultivating rice for more productive ones. Even the promise to supply them with rice should his methods result in crop failure did not persuade them. In desperation he finally filled a warehouse with a year's supply of rice for every person in the village. Only then did the villagers try the methods he espoused. To the American their stubborn refusal seemed at first to be utter stupidity. But he soon realized that for the villagers hunger was a terrible reality, not something they had merely read about, as it is for Americans. They experienced it regularly. And their need to stay alive was much stronger than the promises of an American stranger.

Few of us, to be sure, will ever be agricultural specialists in Asia. But we are constantly faced with the need to take into account the differences in cultural patterns. A food-processing company with international operations must frequently reply to requests for information about foods processed for a special market:

Dear Mrs. Jones:

Thank you for your recent inquiry about the availability of Curd-Cream, a product of our British organization. We have had similar requests from consumer friends who have used this product while visiting in England.

We regret that Curd-Cream cannot be made available here in the States. To import it would make the cost prohibitive to the con-

sumer, and at the present time we do not feel that there is sufficient demand to produce it in the United States.

There are many factors to consider before we can market a new variety:

> Will this variety find favor, nationally or sectionally?
>
> How will its costs compare with other varieties in this same line?
>
> Will its price be acceptable to the consumer?
>
> How available are the raw materials?

Changing market conditions also play a large part in establishing new varieties.

Thanks again for your interest in writing to us. We are sorry that we cannot tell you that Curd-Cream will be available in the United States. But I am sure that you will understand that we can only market a new product in this country if we can be sure of a substantial sale.

Sincerely,

The Self-image

Each writer or speaker must also be careful to keep clearly before him the self-image of the individual or group he seeks to influence. The skillful persuader will not make the same appeals to engineers as he does to mill-workers. The engineer thinks of himself as a professional man. Thus an organization which is patterned after professional associations like the American Medical Association or the American Bar Association will have much more appeal to him than will labor unions like the International Ladies Garment Workers Union or the International Union of Electricians. The first two organizations are compatible with his self-image, the others violate it.

A brief examination of the advertisements in a number of magazines will suggest that advertisers are very much aware of the self-image of their readers. Magazines sold in supermarkets are aimed at the middle-class housewife and those who see themselves in that role. The woman in these ads is still lovely (but needs the right soap and makeup to maintain her loveliness), still romantically appealing to her husband (but needs the right toothpaste and skin creme to maintain that appeal). A good hostess, she is not pretentious (she uses silver plate, not sterling); an efficient cook and baker, she uses packaged cake mixes (with which, however, she bakes

"homemade" cakes). In her life there is always the right balance between ease and wifely duty, always the light brush of comfort to soften the bright and perhaps harsh lines of efficiency. A sales letter to middle-class women will do well not to attack this self-image; it can probably count on success if it fosters it.

Psychologists also tell us that men who have a poor self-image (that is, men whose self-esteem is low) tend to be more easily persuaded than those who have a strongly favorable self-image. This relationship does not hold for women, who show less variation in susceptibility to persuasion. The difference here between men and women seems to be a result of the pressures of our culture, which allow women less latitude in their responses than men—particularly in their responses to people in positions of prestige or authority. Perhaps for the same reason women on the average tend to be more susceptible to persuasion than men.

The Pressures of Society

A knowledge of the pressures and laws (written and unwritten) which a culture pattern establishes and of the ways people respond to them is also essential to effective persuasion. Americans pride themselves on their social mobility: from office boy to bank president, from farm boy or haberdasher to President of the United States. Our culture pattern encourages us to think in these terms. Culture patterns in many other parts of the world, however, support class consciousness and provide sanctions against the upstart who tries to work his way above the position into which he was born. Anyone dealing with foreign customers should understand these differences in culture pattern. A young businessman, for example, who was sent by his company to South America found that his biggest problem was adjusting to the relatively slow rhythm of business there. Only a moderately aggressive person here, he found himself much too brash by South American standards. He discovered very quickly that his new business companions were not impressed by "Yankee ingenuity" and "efficiency." Only when he adjusted to their tempo could he work effectively with them.

Subgroups within a particular culture pattern also have different standards and patterns of response. We have already noted that in the United States women tend to be more persuadable than men. And a study of dieting showed that the higher the class (as measured by education and occupation), the stricter the standard of weight control and the lower the

percentage of overweight people. Clothing styles and preferences in art and literature similarly reflect class. Western driving habits are often different from Eastern driving habits. Farmers do not go to sleep and wake at the same hours as city dwellers.

What a Letter Writer Should Know

A letter writer should understand that all of the needs and tensions we have been describing appear in himself as well as in his reader, and that he must be aware of them. An angry incoming letter may threaten his own security, and he may be tempted to reply angrily. If he understands his reaction, he will be better able to resist the temptation. Understanding these needs and tensions and how they are satisfied, and understanding the concept of the self-image and the relation of the individual to society in various culture patterns, should help a writer to understand better not only his audience but also himself. By understanding and considering both ends of the communication channel, the transmitter (himself) and the receiver (the audience), he will be able to communicate effectively.

All of this may sound as if a person who wants to be a persuasive writer (or speaker) should plunge immediately into a study of psychology, sociology, and anthropology. Knowledge in these areas is useful, of course, and all business and professional people should not only know the elementary concepts presented in this chapter but also make an effort to keep up with new findings in those areas. A salesman, purchasing agent, accountant, personnel or traffic manager, training director, or engineer obviously does not have time, of course, to become an expert social scientist. However, if he trains himself always to "consider the audience," he will always be asking the right questions, and his answers, if he does his job well, will seldom lead him to alienate his reader.

He need not understand, for example, the importance of the self-image to know that he should not criticize a subordinate in public. He need only stop to think how he himself would feel under similar circumstances. Obviously, except in unusual circumstances, there are better methods of persuading a man to improve. Nor need the man who writes an insurance sales letter to professional men prepare a sociological analysis of the attitudes of his audience to realize that he should not speak of the importance

of insurance in protecting wife and children from hunger but stress instead its importance in providing an income that will allow a widow to keep the family home and send her children to college. Similarly, a high-school teacher may evaluate a lesson before he actually teaches it by remembering what he was like as an eleventh- or twelfth-grader and assessing the impact that his planned lesson would have had on him at that time. If he makes allowances for the changes that have occurred in the time that has elapsed, he can tell fairly well whether his lesson will be a success or a failure.

Illustrative Material

All companies must prepare carefully the letters that they send to customers. Here is an address to the American Business Writing Association by William G. Werner, Director of Public and Legal Services for The Procter & Gamble Company, in which he discusses "Putting Good Will into Your Mailbox." In it he applies some of the principles discussed in this chapter:

Any company marketing consumer products or service beyond a very restricted neighborhood is likely to have consumer or customer mail. Among the many contacts which such an organization has with the individual members of its public, none is more important to good will than the contact made through the daily mail.

Procter & Gamble products have such a very wide market, that the Company is likely to receive letters from anybody anywhere on the continent. For this reason, a look at our philosophy concerning consumer mail might be considered as a peep through a magnifying glass at a sort of slide upon which the problems of correspondence have been mounted. These problems, though thus magnified in some ways, are nevertheless essentially the same problems that confront any organization that sells consumer products or services.

Furthermore, I am so bold as to say that the same basic feeling toward the mail as a channel for corporate good will can, with profit, guide the handling of letters, even of organizations which do no "consumer" business as such.

To me it seems self-evident that one's objectives always can come nearer to accomplishment if instinctively the question "Does it make and hold friends?" guides the dictation not only of letters to consumers or customers but of any business letter.

A session of this sort, here today, can be most helpful, if its program is based, not upon theory but actual day-by-day experience.

With this in mind, I shall take the liberty of talking to you somewhat as though I were talking to a new correspondent, who, after very careful selection, is to be given an assignment in the Correspondent Section of our Public Relations Department, where all the correspondence with consumers is handled. Such a correspondent is usually a young woman, because the preponderance of our mail comes from housewives. She has been put through an informative course in our test kitchen, laundry, bakery, beauty shop, and Public Relations Department, so that she is familiar with our products, our employee plans, and our basic company policies.

She has gone over many samples of mail and the replies sent, typical of the kinds of letters she first will be asked to handle. With this background, we should emphasize several points in talking to her, the most important of which are these:

First of all: *A letter to the Company is a personal act of the writer.* When we are confronted with a pile of mail, this fact is easy to forget. Business correspondence, through the years, not only in its traditional stilted phraseology, but also too often in its very physical handling, has been considered a mechanical process, like operating an adding machine—almost a nuisance—instead of a most important channel for building friendship and good will.

When a woman takes up her pen to write a letter, she is entering into quite a different and unique relationship—a personal relationship—with a company. Suddenly she has stopped being one of the mass market; she is a human being writing to some rather mysterious entity which she knows only as a "company" or a "corporation." Whether she is expressing appreciation for the way a product serves her, writing a complaint, seeking help, or offering an idea, she hopes that she is writing to another human being like herself.

The way in which her letter is handled may determine whether she is a friend for life, a disappointed and embittered antagonist, or a confirmed cynic concerning "cold-blooded corporations." It may determine, also, whether a favorable, good-will-building message about the company, or the other kind, is what clicks over that supercharged grapevine of gossip over the back fence between one home and another.

Second, *every letter should be answered.* There are a few exceptions to this—negligible in number. Some letters are unsigned and these obviously are simply tabulated and destroyed. Some are plainly from crackpots

—and I mean crackpots, not just people who disagree with us or don't like our products. Others are clearly mimeographed or form letters. In such cases we do not always answer the letter. But when we let a letter go unanswered, we realize we are departing from our regular policy, and we must have good reason for making such an exception. The supervisor, and in many cases one of the top executives of the Department decides to make this exception—not a correspondent.

I might say that The Procter & Gamble Fund receives many, many letters which ask for contributions which, obviously, cannot be made. Here, too, unless the appeal is plainly machine-made the trustees answer it, to explain why, with regret, they cannot make a contribution. Many times they are glad to see that this method of handling the request brings, in return, the expression, "We are sorry you could not give us a contribution but we do appreciate the trouble you went to to explain why you cannot."

Third, *the answer should carry the company's personality.* A letter from a scientific laboratory might well be different in tone from a letter from a humorous magazine or from a church. In our case, we want our replies to be warm, friendly, gracious, and conversational—occasionally touched with a human sense of humor; they should not be stiff or pompous, never should come from a "cold corporation." We tell our letter writers that if they have to choose between being stiff and stilted, and being a bit gushy and homey, they should certainly choose the latter. Although we do not seek replies to our letters, when we do receive a reply of thanks telling us in so many words that we have been human beings, not just an impersonal creature of the law called a corporation, we like that as a good sign —it is evidence of training along sound lines.

Fourth, *every letter must be answered promptly.* If a woman has written a complaint about one of our products (and when your products are used as widely as ours are, you will get complaints), the subject is very important to her. Perhaps the fault is hers.

She simply may have neglected to dry her hands thoroughly on a cold day, after leaving the kitchen for outdoors, and therefore may have given herself a pair of red hands for which she blamed her soap. Or she may have shrunk a woolen sock by rubbing it on a washboard. Nevertheless, she wants to feel that as soon as that letter reaches its destination, the entire company operation grinds to a halt while her problem is carefully studied. If she receives a reply the next day or so, she is already well on the way toward being pacified.

Nor is a complaint letter the only one which is written by a person who expects a prompt reply. With suggestions and requests for information, too, we like to get a reply off on the day the letter is received. If it poses a question that needs advice of our home economists, chemists, lawyers, or other professional specialists, and if such counsel will require considerable time, we are not afraid to write an interim letter, promising a full reply later. Wherever possible, however, we set up our handling to try to end the suspense immediately.

We have found that with the bouquet letters—the testimonials—we can take longer. The person writing us has nothing at stake and is simply being nice. Usually she doesn't expect a reply at all. If it takes us a week to get a very appreciative note back to her, we have done nothing to lose her friendship or to make her feel badly treated. Often, in fact, such a "thank you" brings us a reply that says, "I didn't expect you to answer at all."

The fifth caution is: *The reply must be written to the individual.* Although we use "pattern letters" and "pattern paragraphs" a great deal, the recipient of the letter should not be able to realize it. When one is replying to stacks and stacks of letters, the caution "Write to the individual" is naturally easy to forget at times. It is easy, for example, for one who is very busy to write replies that sound merely "busy" and "efficient," rather than complete, friendly, and satisfying. It is easy for one who is perhaps by nature a bit impatient to reply to ill-tempered, critical letters with snappy defense logic rather than folksy patience and courtesy.

A man whose ability to reply to difficult letters won my respect years ago used to tell me that whenever he had one of this kind to handle, he used to imagine that he was writing his reply to a certain Mrs. X he knew, who was a rather exacting woman, but one who, he had found, could be won to agreement by sincere, sound reasoning. He would keep her in mind constantly while he was dictating answers to troublesome letters, and his replies invariably showed a friendly sincerity that was extremely persuasive.

Here I should mention an exception to the rule "An individual reply to every letter." We frequently offer premiums to be mailed, and once in a while, despite careful planning, we or the manufacturer of a premium fall behind in a mailing. Because women are quite generally accustomed to receiving printed "delay notices" from mail order houses, we do not attempt to handle such a problem with a letter. Instead, we use a friendly little printed card which states the facts and explains why the woman has not received the article she sent for. But this handling is really a rare exception to our general policy, which is: If a woman can take the time to write

us a personal letter on a subject of importance to her, we certainly can take the time to give her a personal reply, personally signed.

While the reply must be written to the individual, this policy carries with it this caution: *Assume that everything you say is going to be shouted from the house tops*. We are just as careful in what we say to one person as we are in what we broadcast over a coast-to-coast network. Anything we say in a letter must be able to stand the clear light of day, whether it falls into the hands of a competitor, it is read in a courtroom, or even if it is published on the front page of the newspaper.

Finally, there is a "negative" caution: *Guard against getting into a long exchange of letters*. Apparently there are many, many women who would just love to expand the circle of their acquaintance by carrying on a fervid correspondence with anyone who writes the friendly kind of letter we require of our correspondents. They will send you pictures of their dog, they will tell you what a cute remark the baby made about Ivory Soap, or they will tell you—often in embarrassing details—about their intimate personal or family problems. That they should want to do this is flattering, but not conducive to an efficient mail-handling operation.

With all consumer letters, therefore, the subject should be covered fully but then closed graciously, but clearly *closed*.

These, then, are a few of the cautions we would discuss with you, were you this new correspondent in our Public Relations Department. Now I should like to discuss some of the contributions consumer letters can make toward the conduct of the business and to stress some of the problems which they can create.

My next caution, then, would be to management: *Letters can be a valuable source of information, but they also can be misleading*. It is not easy to make a proper distinction, when using letters as a guide to a company's operations, between what is information and what is misinformation. Housewives are very frank in expressing their opinions to us in letters and this very frankness helps us keep our business on the beam. We therefore pay a great deal of attention to what they have to say to us, and each month our Public Relations Department makes a report which circulates among top management and most of the departments of the business, calling attention, product by product, to particularly significant consumer reactions reflected in our mail.

Consumer letters, as a daily contact with the people who make up our

public, thus can serve as a flag to warn us when something we are doing is not being well received, it can call our attention to possible defects in our products, or it can reassure us that we are on the right track.

On the other hand, we should never forget that in our daily mail we are hearing from only a very small segment of the population. Nothing can be more misleading than to assume that a company's daily mail is a "cross section" of consumer opinions. It is not.

This is exemplified most dramatically in following the audience popularity of programs over the air, which is watched very carefully through independent listening surveys.

Although we must be careful how we draw conclusions from radio and television fan mail, we do watch it closely for evidence of any pronounced trend or what you might call a "repetitive pattern" which may guide the writers and producers in making a more acceptable, popular program.

Similarly, the trend of all letters of complaint, criticism, commendation, or inquiry is watched with particular care for any "repetitive pattern" which may prove enlightening. Such a pattern may stimulate product research, recheck of production standards, re-examination of advertising themes, reconsideration of radio or television programs, review of sales policies—in fact, it may cause a check-up in almost any department of the business. The point I am emphasizing, however, is that the check-up or re-examination stimulated by the mail determines what is to be done: the mail itself is not accepted as the decisive factor.

My next caution to management about mail is: *We can get into trouble over suggestions received in the mail.* Our experience has been that consumer mail very seldom brings in an idea in the way of a new product, new use, or change in product, which is of any use to us. This is not surprising. The person writing us is quite unfamiliar with our production, marketing, and cost problems. On any brand we have between 50 and 300 people in our advertising agencies and in our own advertising and technical groups constantly looking for practical ideas for improving our sales. Also, suggestions are encouraged from our sales force, who are handling the products every day.

Some of the ideas we receive from outside are doubtless good ones, but just don't happen to be good for us: they simply do not fit our mass-production and mass-selling organization. Many of the suggestions we receive call our attention to what the writers consider new and unusual uses for our products. Some of them are quite obviously old—such as that Ivory can

be used for shaving or as a dentifrice. Some are indeed interesting, although practically always we know about them through our own research. Some of them are just amusing, such as those which continue to come telling us of a new discovery—that Ivory Soap floats!

Because our mail practically never brings us a real, usable idea for new products or new uses, we try to discourage people who write us offering to submit suggestions of this kind. This is hard to do, we realize, without seeming smug and unfriendly. However, unless such an offer plainly refers to an idea, product, or process already in use, it must be looked upon as a potential source of real legal trouble. For this reason, before we will agree to look at any new idea suggestion that is not patented, we require that it be accompanied by a signed release which, in effect, says that we are to be the sole judges of the value if any, of the idea; and that we are to be under no obligation to accept the idea or pay for it.

From experience, we have found that the best way to explain our position in this respect is to send a rather complete story in the form of a little pamphlet called "About Ideas." In it we explain why the pamphlet was necessary—because we receive so many thousand suggestions from friends who want to help us with new ideas. Then, we go on to tell that almost all of the ideas that our friends want to sell us are not new at all. Then we tell them how to get information on patents but also caution them concerning the difference between a patentable and a nonpatentable idea. Then, we give them a little discussion on the importance of an idea being practicable to our business, as a prerequisite to its use.

At the end of the booklet we tell them that while we do not encourage the submission of ideas, we are willing to look at them with the understanding that we have to determine whether or not we will pay for the idea and the amount. The booklet is made light and easy to read with some balloon cartoons. At the back there are duplicate scored release sheets, one of which can be torn out after being signed, for mailing to us.

I might say that if an inventor wants to divulge a product or process for which he says he has a patent or a patent application pending, the agreement in the booklet requires that he rely on his patent for his protection under the patent laws.

You will see that we avoid being in a position of looking at an idea before we have a release. In all of our correspondence we try very hard to make the writer understand why we cannot use an idea, and if we know that the idea is not new, we try to make it very clear that it represents something that has been tried before, is being used, or which we have repeatedly de-

clined to use. Above all, we try hard to show how very much we appreciate the writer's desire to help us in our problems.

A word may be said here regarding another type of mail—not from consumers—which can lead to legal trouble which might be averted. Every once in a while a letter is received which concerns, say, a trademark, the rights to a television program, alleged misuse of a name, and so on—for examples. Instead of handling these with a formal, stiff, legal-sounding reply, we try to see first of all if friendliness and informality in a letter can pave the way to understanding and agreement where the other course—plainly within our legal rights though it would be—might lead, if not to a lawsuit, to unnecessary ill will at the least. Similarly, the tone of the first letter that asserts our rights, when such a letter is necessary, need not, in doing so, have a "Stop or we'll sue!" tone that makes the reader say "Sue and be damned!" when another more moderate method of handling might be worked out by people of good will.

As you can appreciate from everything I have said, in our endeavor to "put good will into the mail box," we lay great stress upon such factors as:

> Recognizing the personality of the one who writes us;
> Answering practically every letter in some way;
> Putting the personality of the company in our replies;
> The obvious importance of promptness;
> Giving the letters an individual, rather than a machine like, handling and tone;
> Making sure that the letter is safe and proper from the standpoint of basic good business policies.

To accomplish this requires training and careful supervision, and constant review of production. The people answering consumer letters must have an ingrained feeling for the personality of the company they are representing. They must be kept informed of all the company's activities, must know a great deal about the company's history and its operation, and must be free to contact through established channels all branches of the business for help. These people are Procter & Gamble as far as many thousands of housewives are concerned.

I know of no better way to close than to read to you a letter which shows clearly the reward in terms of the sincere good will we are trying to

win. It is from a woman in California, concerning our liquid detergent, Joy, and it reads:

> Dear Procter & Gamble:
>
> Thank you so very much for your good letter explaining to me why I had been having trouble with Joy and for the sample you sent me.
>
> I have followed your suggestions and I am delighted with the results I am getting.
>
> That the mighty can stoop to help the small just emphasizes the strength of this thing called "The American Way." So I send you two thank you's—one for the Joy and one for helping me.

14. Persuasive Letters

In discussing the principles of the psychology of persuasion, we have analyzed several letters and communication situations. We may now look, in a more formal way, at a few specific types of business letters.

Sales Letters

It is wise to convince a potential customer that he needs a service or product before trying to sell it to him. Presumably every product satisfies a need or it would not be manufactured, and every service satisfies a need or it would not be offered. The problem, therefore, is how to convince the particular audience addressed that it needs the product or service.

A letter from a shoe store addressed to women on a mailing list obtained from a maternity hospital might begin:

> Whether this is your first child or your fourth, the new baby in your home has probably started you thinking about the additional responsibility you have just undertaken. A baby—small, helpless, and utterly dependent on those around it—generally makes even the most experienced parent feel just a little bit inadequate. The future will bring so many problems: health and growth, education and training, insurance. . . .
>
> We'd like to help you with just one of these many problems—your baby's health. You know, of course, how important it is for a child to have healthy feet. Bad feet seriously handicap a child or an

adult and can cause all sorts of other physical problems. Our shoes. . . .

A letter from the same shoe store to the parents of students in a nearby preparatory school would take a different approach:

> Since you obviously are interested enough in your child to invest in a good education for him, you must also be interested in his health. We would like to offer our services in helping you to guard his health while he is away from home.
>
> Boys of your son's age grow quickly and in spurts. Thus the shoes that he left home with in September may be too small for him by November or December. Why not have him stop in to see us in a week or so? We know a lot about boys, and feet, and shoes. And we can do for you what you yourself would do if he were home—make sure that he's got enough room in the shoes that he's wearing. . . .

Notice that the opening of each sales letter not only stresses the reader's need but also applies some of the other principles we have discussed. Each is aimed at a specific audience. Each appeals to the maternal drive—or in the larger sense, to the feeling of parental responsibility. The second also appeals to the self-image of the parents in a particular socio-economic group: upper-middle-class and upper-class parents who can afford to pay for a private education for their children and who probably tend to be a little self-congratulatory about it. Both are also worded positively.

In these chapters we have deliberately avoided stating that a sales letter should begin with a device for "getting the reader's interest." We have avoided the phrase for two reasons. In the first place, the best way to get the reader's interest is to show him that he needs what you have to sell—the approach which has just been demonstrated. Second, the phrase "getting the reader's interest" focuses attention on the word *interest* rather than on the word *reader*. The result often is a search for the bizarre, which leads to the kind of openings featured in *The New Yorker* under the heading of "Letters We Never Finished Reading":

(*from a magazine*)

Dear Subscriber:

My wife did me a good turn last week. As I . . .

(*from a publisher*)

Dear Friend in Education:

A check of our subscription file shows that you do not now sub-

scribe to MODERN PRACTICES IN EDUCATION. That worries us. MODERN . . .

(*from a department store*)

Dear Busy Body:

You are a busy body, are you not? So much to do, so many problems . . .

(*from a magazine*)

Dear Sir/Madam,

Perhaps we have been a little hesitant in waiting a hundred years before introducing THE SQUIRE'S CALENDAR to you . . .

(*from a laundry*)

Dear Friend:

If a tear rolls down the page as you open this letter, please forgive us. You . . .

(*from a publisher*)

Dear Friend of Progress:

The . . .

Sometimes a writer seeks to arouse the reader's interest by what he thinks is imaginative use of language. Here is a letter from a management consulting firm to a potential customer:

Dear Mr. Johnston:

Today's greater need for cost control is rubbing salt into many open sores of impatience toward the slow pace of data processing improvements.

Harried internal staffs may not neglect normal service on existing operations, yet tabulating procedures resulting from spare-time planning yield refinements with air-raid-siren urgency, and there is much need for a fair-minded understanding toward slow progress in implementing many of the benefits of mechanization originally contemplated.

Air-raid-siren urgency, indeed! The letter shrieks, but not in the way the writer intended it to. In the first place, the image of an open sore does not provide an attractive opening. The writer probably chose it because he thought that it would have impact. It does—the wrong kind. One may get a potential customer's attention with a nauseating odor or by hitting him with a truck, but that is hardly the way to *keep* his attention. Second, the two paragraphs quoted show the pretentiousness discussed often in earlier

chapters: "normal service on existing operations" (why not "regular service to customers"?); "tabulating procedures resulting from spare-time planning need refinements" (why not "tabulating procedures set up hurriedly must be re-examined"?); "a fair-minded understanding" (what does that mean?); "toward slow progress" (an anticlimax after "air-raid-siren urgency"); "in implementing many of the benefits of mechanization originally contemplated" (can benefits which have not yet been earned be "implemented"?). Neon lights or fireworks, used correctly, can be very effective. Used incorrectly, however, they simply illuminate incompetence.

Probably the most difficult kind of sales letter to prepare is the one aimed at a mass audience. With no specific group to write for, the writer often resorts to a "gimmick." He may attach a bit of colored string to the top of the letter and say, "If you string along with us . . ." Or he may attach an untied miniature bow tie and invite his reader to "Tie this if you can." If not too farfetched, such devices may win the continued attention of the audience. The writer should be careful, however, not to slip into pretentiousness, cuteness, or mawkishness, which are inappropriate for business.

In such sales letters it is often profitable to include a business reply card. The reader may simply check items in which he is interested, sign his name, and drop the card in the mail. A potential customer will often take the minute or two necessary to complete such a card when he will not write a letter for further information. The last paragraph of the sales letter, of course, should call the reader's attention to the reply card and invite him to use it.

Whether one uses a business reply card or not, his last paragraph should always invite the reader to take action: "Stop in next week . . ."; "Call SA 7-5320 . . ."; "Ask our salesman about TYREX the next time he stops in . . ."; "Take us up on this offer by sending . . ." Certainly such endings say more than "Thank you for your courtesy . . ." or "If we can be of any service to you, please don't hesitate . . ." They are positive. They are not rubber stamps. And they suggest action.

The body of the letter, of course, should supply the facts necessary to convince the reader. And here, more than in any other part of the letter, the facts ought to speak for themselves. Statements about quality of performance, comments by people who have used the product, a list of customers, information that will show the reader how and where he can employ the product profitably—all of these may be useful, depending upon the circumstances. Once a writer has attracted the audience's attention, it is

what the product has to recommend it that will determine its sales. But a good writer will not retire after the initial fanfare. Difficult as an eye-catching opening often is, the sustained effort of the rest of the performance is even more difficult. A writer's audience can desert him much more quickly than a singer's or an actor's, and with much less reluctance. They need only throw his letter into the nearest wastepaper basket, for they have no investment in it—no time spent in preparation, no money spent for tickets, no commitment to pay attention.

Collection Letters

Writers of collection letters, too, should "consider the audience." A customer may simply have forgotten an overdue bill, or may be temporarily short of funds. To insult him is poor policy. Thus the first or second letter ought to be simply a polite reminder. The writer may also wish to inquire whether failure to pay the bill is in any way a result of poor service.

In later letters the writer will probably want to use some sort of appeal or suggestion that the customer is causing unnecessary embarrassment or expense for himself and the writer:

> Dear Mr. Williams:
> We'd like you to help us save a customer—*you*. If you don't pay your bill, we'll have to send you more letters. That, certainly, will drive you away from us, a prospect we don't enjoy. So . . .

> Dear Mr. Samuels:
> We don't want to turn your bill over to a collection agency. Neither you nor we will profit by it . . .

If he understands the principles we have outlined earlier in the chapter, the writer of a collection letter can appeal to the customer's self-image:

> Dear Mr. Williams:
> As a competent businessman, you know that a company's credit rating is a major indicator of its success . . .

Or—in a last-ditch effort—to his need for status and security:

> Dear Mr. Frank:
> We had hoped that by this time your account would be cleared up, but payment has not yet arrived. Needless to say, we have no

desire to turn this account over to a collection agency, for we have found that such matters quickly become common knowledge with unpleasant results for all concerned . . .

Or he can attempt to invoke customs or rules of the business community to which the delinquent customer belongs:

Dear Mr. George:

The members of the Shadyside Merchants Association have established an excellent reputation for paying their bills. As you know, they are considered excellent credit risks and sometimes obtain terms not available to other merchants.

As a member of the Association, you are risking the reputation of the entire business community . . .

Claim and Adjustment Letters

Since few people are grateful for attacks on their competence, pleasant claim letters are generally more successful than those which snarl. The best approach is to explain the difficulty carefully and conclude with a statement of confidence that the error will be corrected or the defect remedied. On occasion one has to snarl to get satisfaction. But since most businesses are run by people who want to satisfy the customer, it is generally bad policy to assume that one need display anger when presenting a claim. To do so is to invite anger in return.

Adjustment letters are of three general types: they agree with the claimant, they ask for further information, or they disagree with the claimant. But whatever the type, they should be courteous. Whether his reasons are valid or not, the person writing a claim letter is at least annoyed and possibly angry. Any indication of suspicion in the adjustment letter or any unwarranted or ill-tempered suggestion that a claim is fraudulent will be sure to make the situation worse (see, for example, the Bacon-Lundberg correspondence on pp. 34–37). The following letter does the required job:

Dear Mr. Jones:

The rest of your order will be on its way this afternoon.

Unfortunately, our shipping department stamped the invoice "COMPLETE," but a recheck showed that you are perfectly right. We still owe you ten dozen of No. 728.

We are sorry that you did not get all the towels you ordered last month. We hope that we have not unduly inconvenienced you.

Yours truly,

The letter is short and businesslike, but friendly and courteous. It does not go into long involved explanations or fulsome apologies or expressions of regret. It admits the error and indicates that steps have been taken to rectify it promptly. Notice how it differs from the following letter, which "says the same thing":

Dear Mr. Jones:

We have your letter of June 17 in which you say that we still owe you ten dozen towels (No. 728) even though the invoice was stamped "COMPLETE." This is a most unusual circumstance. The people in our shipping department are very careful in making up and checking each order.

Our investigation shows that your claim seems to be valid. As a result we have directed our shipping department to send you an additional ten dozen of No. 728.

Yours truly,

This letter offers an explanation which turns into a statement of disbelief (paragraph one) and suggests that there is still some doubt about the validity of the claim. It says nothing about when the towels are to be shipped. And it offers no apology.

A letter requesting further information should similarly avoid reflecting suspicion:

Dear Mr. Wilson:

We are sorry to hear that you are dissatisfied with your lawn mower. If you will give us the information requested on the enclosed form and return the form to us, we will send it to the authorized service station in your neighborhood. Our service agent will then call on you to discuss what should be done.

If you prefer, you may get in touch with one of our agents directly. You will find enclosed a list of those in your area.

The Roto-Cut Company feels that satisfied customers are its best advertisement, so naturally we want you to be pleased with your Roto-Mower.

Yours truly,

Notice the different effect of the following letter:

Dear Mr. Wilson:

We are surprised to hear that you are dissatisfied with your lawn

mower and that the clerk in the hardware store where you bought it told you to write to us about it.

In order to evaluate your claim, we will need further information. Would you, therefore, fill in the attached form and return it to us. We will then send it to an authorized service station, where one of our service agents will check it.

You can save some time by consulting your phone book and getting the name of your local service agent directly, as the instruction booklet which came with your lawn mower directed.

Yours truly,

This letter not only suggests that the writer does not trust the claimant, but also that the claimant can't read. The whole approach is pointless. The first letter does not commit the company to any more than the second does. It took no longer to write. If a letter must be written, it might just as well be one that is pleasant.

The letter which disagrees with the claimant or denies his request is, of course, the most difficult to write. Take this one:

Dear Mr. Silvers:

This will acknowledge your letter of July 16. Company policy does not allow us to accept responsibility for failure of Roof-O-Spray applications not made by trained Roof-O-Spray workmen. All purchase agreements for Roof-O-Spray carry this stipulation. If you will check your original correspondence and your copy of the invoice, you will find that requirement clearly stated as part of the business agreement.

Yours truly,

Being a little more sympathetic will do no harm and may do some good:

Dear Mr. Silvers:

We are sorry that the Roof-O-Spray that you applied did not hold up as well as you expected.

Applying sealing sprays is a highly specialized job. For that reason we urge our customers to use the services of the Roof-O-Spray agency from whom they buy the material.

Mr. Simpson of the Simpson Contracting Company, from whom you bought your Roof-O-Spray, tells me that he discussed the matter with you and pointed out that the purchase agreement stipulated that applications not made by trained Roof-O-Spray workmen were not guaranteed.

Perhaps you felt that this was an unwarranted requirement set up to provide more business for our agents. We have heard that some

firms in other fields operate that way. I'm happy to say, however, that we do not. We encourage the customer, for example, to apply our Plast-O-Spray himself.

We are sorry to have to tell you that we cannot assume responsibility for the application of Roof-O-Spray by your workmen. As an experienced businessman you will understand our position.

I have asked Mr. Simpson to examine the application without any expense to you. He may be able to suggest something that will help.

Yours truly,

The second letter will take a little longer to write than the first. But the extra investment of time and thought will certainly be worthwhile. It may mean the difference between losing and keeping a customer. Note, too, that the second letter appeals to Mr. Silvers' self-image as a responsible, intelligent businessman, whereas the first letter impugns that self-image and suggests that Silvers is trying to weasel out of an agreement. The second letter also tries to be helpful instead of just leaving Mr. Silvers to solve his own problem—and nurse his grievance.

The best way to deal with a claim letter to which the reply must be "no" is first to be sympathetic (without accepting responsibility), next to explain as reasonably as possible why the claimant's request cannot be granted, then to tell him "no," and finally to be as helpful as possible under the circumstances.

The writer must remember always to check his tendency to be sharp in replying to a letter which seems unreasonable or which reflects badly on his company and "consider the reader"—who may well have cause for complaint. If he does not have cause for complaint, he may honestly not know that he does not. And even if he knows that he is being unreasonable, a reasonable, pleasant reply may well change his attitude. Replying to an angry claim letter with an angry adjustment letter may satisfy the self-image of the writer as an important person or help him release the frustration that he has been building up while dealing with other complaints, but it also does harm to the image of the company in the mind of the customer.

Letters of Application

By itself, a letter of application does not often get a job for an applicant. But it is certainly the first shot in an important sales campaign. If it is

a dud, there may well be no second shot. For the letter may either secure for the applicant the opportunity of appearing in person or it may lose that opportunity for him. Because letters of application are so important, particularly to newcomers in business and industry, we have included a special article about them ("Communications in Your Job Quest" by Arch W. Hunt) in the Illustrative Materials which follow this chapter.

Every letter a businessman writes is an important letter. It makes little sense for the advertising department to spend large amounts of money trying to project a favorable image of a company if other departments undercut that effort by writing pretentious, curt, or surly letters.* As one large company tells its letter writers:

> Any one of the hundreds of thousands of letters our people write in a year can add to or detract from our valued reputation. *What* we say in each letter and *how* we say it have a real effect on the company's success.
>
> Our company, to us, is a group of people working together, buying raw materials, processing and marketing quality products. But to the people outside our company, whose only contact with us may be through our letters, each of us *is* the company.
>
> In every letter, we have unlimited opportunities to build good will for ourselves and for the company.

This statement is true for all kinds of persuasive letters—and for nonpersuasive letters too. Whether an employee is an accountant, an engineer, a home economist, a lawyer, a personnel man, a scientist, or a training director, in every letter or memo that he writes he is a salesman for his department and his company—and for himself.

Illustrative Materials

1

The one business communication in which everyone agrees that a writer should be persuasive, should project his personality at its

* Humor or pleasantry is sometimes effective in dealing with a dissatisfied customer, as the Dawson-Turner correspondence in Chapter 2 shows (pp. 25–28). But unless it is deftly handled it can be very dangerous. The customer seldom sees any humor in the situation and any attempt to get him to do so is likely to be disastrous.

best, and give the reader exactly what he wants to know is the letter of application. Yet many letters of application are badly written. Although the following article was prepared for college students, it will repay careful study by others as well, for it concerns a practical application of many of the ideas advanced in this and other chapters.

Communications in Your Job Quest*

By Arch W. Hunt

The so-called business readjustment months of the 1957-1958 college and university recruiting season left little doubt in the mind of the college senior of the value of written communications. For the first time in several years, most seniors—and alumni returning from service—discovered that the search for a career opportunity was a competitive venture.

While on-campus company interviews generally remained plentiful, most college placement offices reported some cancellations of on-campus interviews by companies who had been conducting regularly scheduled interviews for the past several years. What had been a seller's market for the senior was now the reverse. Suddenly, those graduating from college found themselves face to face with a company interviewer who was more selective because he had fewer jobs to offer. The company representative was looking for that intangible something called "top quality."

To add to the senior's dilemma, more seniors signed up for fewer company interviews and "top quality" became a prime competitive prerequisite.

Thus, not only did the senior have to project well his personality, his desires, and his capabilities in the oral company interview on campus, but he had to negotiate further for the career opportunity through written communications. All this took place in a highly competitive market where the slightest slip-up in communications might mean being eliminated from consideration for the job.

Conversely, seniors and alumni who were not successful in securing career positions through campus interviews found it necessary, through the help and guidance of college placement officers, to search out the career opportunity among companies other than those interviewing on campus.

* *College Placement Annual 1959*, pp. 21–23. Mr. Hunt is Director of Placement at Baylor University.

To do this they were, in most cases, advised to use a letter of application, and as a result, personnel representatives received a deluge of letters from eager college seniors. Some of them were good, some were bad, and some were just plain indifferent.

Now a personal letter of application is second only to the personal interview in its effectiveness as an instrument of communication. In terms of value for personal use, no type of letter ranks higher than the letter applying for a position. Everyone recognizes this fact, but not everyone has the will power to follow the truth to its conclusion and make himself the master of the application art. Already overworked personnel directors wryly admit that college seniors are no exception.

It is the conclusion of most placement directors, also, that an astonishingly large majority of job-hunting seniors—and others for that matter—do not have the slightest idea of how to write a letter that will advance their chances of getting work. Although most come from reputable colleges and universities and have good educations, either they were taught nothing about the value of application letters for personal use or else they have forgotten all they once knew.

There is overwhelming evidence to show the vital importance of application letters in winning interviews with prospective employers. Outside of the personal interview, "the letters a candidate writes probably have most weight," concludes a recent survey, "in securing him an interview and a job." Most company personnel directors complain that applicants for a job have no conception of what a good letter looks like.

As reiterated in college textbooks and by other authorities on the subject, a letter of application is a selling letter. It sells you—the applicant. Specifically, it sells your training, your skill, your knowledge, your service. Yes, it even sells your personality. Just as an attractively packaged product is sold by the well-conceived sales letter, so you are sold by your application letter. It will be the most intensely personal letter you will ever write in business. It represents the person that is you as it reaches your prospective employer's desk; in a sense, it will be you.

All consumer goods are sold in competition, and so it will be with your capabilities. Your letter must be so designed and constructed that it will compete with other applicants, equally as earnest and capable as you, who want the same position.

Of two men, equal in all-around capabilities, the one who knows better the techniques involved in an application letter will get the position. First, he knows how to state to advantage what he can do. Second, he has the all-

essential knack of showing how "what he can do" measures up with what the employer wants done. Just as surely as James Russell Lowell's "Roots, wood, bark and leaves singly perfect may be; but clapped hodge-podge together, they don't make a tree," the well-written application letter fits together the teeth of two gears—"what you can do" meshes into "what must be done."

It is not enough to state each of your traits, skills, and experiences so that they may be understood standing alone. If your application letter is to be effective—if the facts about you are to function together to accomplish your purpose—your material must be well organized.

Here is a brief review of some of the fundamental principles to be observed in writing a letter of application:

1. A letter intended to attract employer interest should be individually typed. A printed or mimeographed message kills interest before the recipient begins to read it.

2. Good quality white paper should be used. The sheet should conform to standard letter size (8½″ x 11″). The wisdom of using a printed letterhead is doubtful. Certainly "fancy" stationery is taboo.

3. Neatness is a golden asset, as "first impressions are lasting." The letter should be neat and should conform to good business style. It should be balanced on the page in symmetrical fashion to give it proper proportions.

4. It should be addressed to a specific person, including first name and/or initials, surname, and title. This information may be secured through your college placement office, or from this *Annual*.

5. The first paragraph should establish a point of contact: Reveal the purpose of the letter; suggest where you learned of the company, or mention the name of some individual with whom the prospective employer is acquainted and who has suggested that you write. The opening sentence should be followed by a specific statement about the general area of employment in which you are interested, and, if possible, a brief sentence showing you have knowledge that the company normally employs college graduates who possess skills and training similar to yours.

6. The second paragraph should be so designed as to show how your education and experience fit requirements for the job, and be based upon selected facts taken from your career. These facts should be chosen and sifted, if necessary, until you find the precise ones that bear on the employer's needs. Out of your experience, your education, and your training, choose the elements that focus on the employer's wants. The data sheet,

which accompanies the application letter, can serve as a general repository to carry, in tabulated summary, the additional but less pertinent data.

7. In an additional paragraph the applicant might explain, in personal terms, why he feels confident he can be successful in the position for which he is asking to be considered. References are like guaranties, but should be included in the attached personal data summary. The inclusion of the summarized data sheet is a good and acceptable practice. However, should you decide against the additional use of the data form, it is in order to include references in the application letter.

8. Finally, the last paragraph should (1) stimulate action toward an interview and (2) make that action easy. All must be "at the convenience" of the prospective employer.

The personal data summary should be confined to one page. Remember, whereas the letter is a place in which to demonstrate personality, capacity, and individuality, the data summary is the place to classify the assembled information (about you) in tabular form. It must serve as a convenient and compact summary for quick reference by the busy company executive. It should be firmly clipped to the application letter.

While the applicant should shape the data summary to fit his particular needs, the following information is usually included:

(a) General details—personal: name, age, birthplace, height and weight, physical condition, marital status, religion,* citizenship, present address, permanent address, telephone number.

(b) Education (since high school): name of colleges attended, dates of attendance, degree or degrees received or expected, date, major and minor taken, and special fields of study which may have a bearing on the job you are seeking.

(c) Scholastic and extracurricular information: awards, scholarships, honor societies, campus activities, publications, avocational interests and achievements.

(d) Employment experience: full-time and significant part-time or summer work, name of employer, job title, duties, and dates of employment. Many jobs are awarded on the strength of part-time and summer work experiences.

(e) Military status (for men).

* In states with Fair Employment Practices laws, prospective employers generally are forbidden either to ask an applicant to state his religion or to require him to submit a photograph.—W.M.S. and E.R.S.

(f) Type of work desired.

(g) Date of availability for employment.

Personal data summaries may be mimeographed, duplicated, or printed, and a small photograph should be attached. By all means, maintain a file containing copies of letters of application and of the replies received.

Now come the decisions! If your application letter has been properly written and the employer likes what he sees on the data form, you will be receiving invitations to visit the plant or home office for a personal interview. If you decide to accept, a suitable time schedule must be negotiated which will least interfere with class work. Here promptness in answering correspondence is of paramount importance. If you decide not to accept the invitation, you should immediately write the company a letter of thanks for its interest in you but state forthrightly your inability to accept. It is usually good public relations to include the reason.

A great deal of investigation and screening has taken place before a company makes an offer, or even, for that matter, calls you in for an interview. Your negligence or hesitancy in replying may create bad public relations for you, your Alma Mater, and at the same time cause another applicant to lose out. The company cannot move until you decide to (1) accept, (2) reject, or (3) ask for a temporary postponement. In most instances, the latter request should not be based on whether you need more time, but rather should be related to the need for further negotiation as to the type of work or other facts about employment.

Businesslike promptness and professional courtesy in answering all correspondence should be a rule of thumb to be observed by all applicants. In the first paragraph, a positive acceptance should be expressed in words of appreciation for being offered the position. A recapitulation of the terms and conditions of employment is in order in the second paragraph, as is the approximate date that you can report for work. This can be followed in the third paragraph by the assurance of your early compliance with company instructions for a physical examination, birth certificate, or other required procedures.

In conclusion, beware of "models." So personal is an application letter, data summary, and other correspondence related to the job search that all communications must be the individual effort of each writer. There should appear annually on each personnel director's desk just as many different individualistic application letters as there are graduating seniors to write them. Therefore, avoid borrowed plumage. The quality and con-

tent of your written communications may not only secure a career opportunity for you but give lasting impressions that will largely determine your future progress with the company.

2

Here is an exchange of letters about a serious blunder:

Magna Box Company
72 Franklin Street
Newark 4, New Jersey

Attention: Mr. Paul Sully
Sales Department
Reference: Complaint from your customer relations man regarding slow payment of your invoices in total of $1,900.00

Dear Mr. Sully:

Recently we received a letter regarding slow payment which we sincerely feel was sent injudiciously. The implication was made that we might feel "pinched" by having to pay $1,900.00 all at once. The treasurer of our company has assured me that invoices are paid promptly whether the amount is $190.00, $1,900.00, or $19,000.00. We have never had any vendors complain about our methods of paying our invoices. We follow the same rules as all accredited firms in discounting our invoices, with net/30 day invoices being handled in the secondary cycle. In special instances where a vendor requests rapid payment of a bill, the Purchasing Department always sees that such a request is honored, if the request is bona fide.

Please understand that we do not mind your asking about an invoice that might possibly have gone astray, for we are anxious to clear such matters up as quickly as possible.

Yours truly,
ATLAS NOVELTY COMPANY

JAMES L. MCGEE
Purchasing Agent

Atlas Novelty Company
1428 Navarre Street
Brooklyn 25, New York

Attention: Mr. James L. McGee

Dear Mr. McGee:

When Mr. Sully showed me your letter, it really made me blush. We have as you know thousands of accounts and many hundreds of letters going out of our Collection Department each week. I make it my personal task to review the letters each week to eliminate those which would be as you say "injudicious."

It was my fault for failing, through negligence, for that is all it can possibly be, to eliminate the letter that you received from the run-of-the-mill collection reminders.

I do hope that you will accept my humble apology which I write in utmost frankness.

Not only I, but every member of our company value your business and more than anything your good will. I know that you pay your bills most promptly, and in an exemplary manner.

Thank you for understanding.

Yours truly,
MAGNA BOX COMPANY

JOHN F. BRINDLE
General Credit Manager

a. *How could the blunder have been avoided?*
b. *Is Mr. Brindle's reply a good one?*
c. *What are its strong points? What are its weak points?*
d. *Would you have written a similar reply or a different one? Explain.*
e. *How would you evaluate Mr. McGee's letter?*

3

Here is a "sales letter" that was successful. It is not a particularly polished piece of prose. The actual letter was evidently typed by the man who signed it rather than by a secretary, for the margins were ragged, there were several strikeovers, and several of the periods

were missing. (We have put them in and regularized the spacing to make the reading easier.)

Jan. 15th, 1954

Mr. E. E. Austin—Purchasing Agent
Johnson Manufacturing Co.
Lake St.
Milwaukee, Wis.

Dear Mr. Austin,

I dislike annoying you again, but I am again asking why I have not had the pleasure of hearing from you in nearly 3 months. I have always been proud of the fact that I had an account like Johnson Manufacturing Co. having built it up from nothing over a 20 year period, to a nice sizable account in 1952. Now without warning I find I practically han't the account anymore. This makes me feel terrible. Do you know Mr. Austin, how impossible it is to replace a new customer? When I approach business firms, I usually get the standard remark, 'we have to be loyal to those people who during and after the critical war years, helped us out with merchandise hard to obtain.' Of course to this no one can give an adequate answer. Unfortunately, in many cases I was not so treated, Mr. Austin, in my place just what would you do in this matter. Please let me hear from you soon.

Very truly yours,

NICHOLAS NEUSTADT

What is the appeal of this letter? Would it have been successful with you? Would a letter of similar tone (although better written) have been appropriate from a large corporation? Explain your answers.

4

The following letter is a reply to a telephone complaint from a customer. It followed a similar explanation over the phone.

Mr. Wilson Bronk
Bronson Metals Company
Hanna, West Virginia

Dear Sir:

We were sorry to learn from your conversation of today that the 50 tons of Alclad waste recently shipped from our Chicago Works did not come up to your expectations.

Naturally, this is indeed unfortunate, but at the time the sale was consummated we believe the material was represented to you as we saw it, so that there would be no subsequent misunderstanding. Furthermore, we feel quite certain that you are familiar with the basis of sale on all secondary products, in that we make no definite guarantee other than the general statement that such material shall reasonably approach the tolerances expected of primes, from which they were rejected.

We have investigated your complaint with our mill people; and, since they are quite certain a good delivery for the grade ordered was made, and, together with the conditions of sale, we regret to advise that in this instance we are unable to honor a claim.

Very truly yours,
ALCLAD METALS CORPORATION

J. G. BINDER
Manager of Sales

a. *How would you evaluate this letter?*
b. *Can you improve it? Explain.*

5

The four collection letters below form a series. What devices has the writer used to try to extract payment from Mr. Johnson? Does the tone vary? Why?

July 15, 1959

Dear Mr. Johnson:

Our records show that you have not yet remitted the $175.25 which was due on June 1.

We shall appreciate your sending a check as soon as possible.

Sincerely yours,

August 10, 1959

Dear Mr. Johnson:

We have not yet received from you a check for the $175.25 which has been overdue for more than two months now.

If by any chance you are having financial difficulties which make it impossible for you to send the entire sum right now, we'll be happy to have you indicate what arrangements would suit you best for taking care of this account.

May we hear from you soon?

Sincerely yours,

September 1, 1959

Dear Mr. Johnson:

As you will have guessed, we are writing once again about your account with us.

We do not know, of course, why we have not heard from you. Since you have been a good customer in the past, we can only assume that exceptional circumstances must have caused the delay.

How about writing a line or two of explanation on the back of this letter and returning it in the enclosed envelope? If you can send a check too, we'll be very happy to receive it.

Sincerely,

October 1, 1959

Dear Mr. Johnson:

We have done our best to convince you that we would be happy to work out an equitable method for settling your account of $175.25.

Naturally we do not like to submit any customer to the embarrassment of a collection process. On the other hand, we cannot stay in business if our customers do not pay their bills. We remain ready to make mutually agreeable arrangements for the payment of your bill, and we hope that you will get in touch with us right away so that we may do so. If you do not, we shall be forced to turn the matter over to our attorneys for appropriate action. We sincerely hope that you will make this unnecessary by dropping us a line—or a check—by return mail.

Very truly yours,

6

Some companies use "gimmicks" in an attempt to get the customer to pay his bill. What effect would each of the following have on you?

(Attached to the top of this letter is a fish hook and fly.)

Dear Mr. Thomas:

Perhaps you know that the trout season opens next week. If you're a fisherman, we hope you'll use our fly and that you'll catch a lot of speckled beauties with it.

We're fishing too—for the $45.25 you owe us. How about sending a check before you leave for the trout streams?

Sincerely,

Dear Mr. Perkins:

Roses are red
Violets are blue.
We regret to say
Your bill's overdue.

Amount $50.10

Very truly yours,

15. Reading and Listening

Much has been written in recent years about the responsibilities of the writer and the speaker: the speaker at board meetings, banquets, group conferences, or training sessions; and the writer of letters, reports, advertising copy, memoranda, or any of the many other types of communications which pass into, through, and out of a business organization. Until recently, however, very little has been said about the responsibilities of the reader and the listener. Yet it should be obvious enough that even the most carefully planned and executed report, the ideal sales letter, the most efficient memorandum will be useless if it is not read with thoughtful attention. The finest speech cannot convince an individual who either cannot or will not listen attentively to what is being said. Certainly the writer and the speaker have the primary responsibility for making a communication effective. They must capture and hold their audience. If they do not do their job, their attempt at communication will fail no matter how receptive the audience may be.

Communication involves three essential elements—a transmitter, a medium through which or by means of which a message is transmitted, and a receiver. All three elements are important to the success of any communication, but in this chapter we shall concern ourselves largely with the human receiver.

Obviously if a receiver is turned off completely, communication will not take place. This situation seldom occurs while we are reading or while

we are listening. More often than not, the human receiver is not tuned in properly or may be operating only intermittently. Such inefficient reception is usually caused by bad reading or listening habits.

Inefficient Reading and Listening

Investigators who have studied the functioning of the human brain do not agree on the detailed operation of its 13 billion cells, but most are agreed that it functions at very great speeds and that its most important medium is language. Although thoughts may pass through our brains "like lightning," the number of words our eyes can read and the number of words our lips can form in a given length of time is limited.

The average American will speak somewhere between 125 and 150 words per minute; he reads in the same period about 300 words. But his brain, psychologists tell us, is capable of functioning many times more rapidly: by a conservative estimate, the brain needs only one tenth as much time to receive and decode an oral message as it takes a speaker to deliver it. Thus we have a situation not unlike that in which the proverbial hare and tortoise found themselves. But our hare, the human brain, is in an even less comfortable situation than the hare in the proverb, who could have gone ahead, if he had wished, and scampered across the finish line. The brain cannot do so: when receiving, it can move toward the finish no faster than the eye can read or the ear can pick up a message. And tests have shown that speech cannot be speeded up significantly and still be understood.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the human brain, capable of very rapid thought and prevented from moving more rapidly than the slow rate at which information is normally transmitted and received, tends to imitate the hare. It may either take a nap or—more likely—dash off on a variety of excursions. From these side trips it will return now and then to check on the progress of the tortoise before rushing off again. Anyone who has listened to a speech will recognize this process. During a fifteen-minute talk on economic conditions in South America, we typically find ourselves day-dreaming about the beach at Waikiki, what we will say to our son when he brings home an undistinguished report card, the embarrassing encounter at lunch with a classmate we would like to forget, what we should have said to the blonde at the cigar counter, whether the grass should be cut tonight

or over the week end, how to keep the dog from breaking off the branches of the little azalea plant by the porch steps, and so on. All the while, we assure ourselves, we have been listening to the speaker. We know roughly what he said: Brazil is on its way up; conditions in Argentina are uncertain; Bolivia is seeking American capital. But if we are pressed for details, we will probably be in trouble. Here and there an isolated fact has penetrated—probably because it has some direct bearing on our life. Having argued a night or two ago with a friend about coffee and its price, we prick up our ears when the speaker says that coffee is in abundant supply and that Brazil is selling it for 15 percent less this year than last. But most of the details, many of them bearing directly on the speaker's argument, are lost to us as soon as they are voiced. We simply do not take them in.

It has been estimated that the average businessman spends about 70 percent of his hours on the job in some communication activity and that nearly half of this time is spent in listening. If he listens no better than we have indicated above, he is not functioning effectively; he is not doing his job.

The obvious way to attack the problem of inefficient reading or listening—and each of us can improve in these skills—is to harness the nine tenths of the brain's activity which is not needed for the reception of the message and put it to constructive use. Like the waters of a great river, our thoughts must be channeled if they are to be productive. The result is intellectual power, which derives from the ability to assimilate and make a useful synthesis of what we read or hear.

How, then, is this to be done? The essential requirement is to convert our brain power from aimless daydreaming to concentration on the subject at hand; or, to put it more simply, to fasten our complete attention on what the writer or speaker is saying. We must keep the hare out of the thickets and teach it to stay close to the tortoise, studying its progress and its method in moving toward the finish line.

Establishing Useful Habit Patterns

Recognizing the importance of skill in receiving communications, the good listener establishes a series of useful habit patterns. When he picks up a report or a book, he pauses briefly to consider why he is about to read it. Is he after an answer to specific questions? If so, what are they? He may

even jot down the questions on a sheet of paper, allowing room for brief notes on what he discovers in the text. Such stock-taking is very useful, for he reads better when he reads for a purpose and has that purpose clearly in mind.

Before he begins to read, he should carefully study the materials which surround the text of the book or report—the table of contents, the preface or abstract, the appendixes, the index, and similar materials which help him to determine what ground the report covers and how it is organized. Thus he will be able to read quickly and comfortably instead of having to feel his way.

If the reader is dealing with a report, a careful study of the peripheral materials may reveal that instead of his having to wade through hundreds of pages—a task which he can hardly be expected to approach with enthusiasm—he may need to read only 15 to obtain the information he needs. If the report has been organized so that the reader can cut into it at one of several levels of complexity, he may easily avail himself of the opportunity to read only what he needs. If it is not well organized, he may still save time by reading selectively, using the table of contents, chapter headings, subheadings, and other indications of organization to help him find what he wants. Even if the conclusions are not presented at the beginning of the report, he may turn to the end of the text to glance at them before starting to read: with a set of conclusions firmly in his mind, he is prepared to consider the validity of the writer's means of getting to them.

The efficient listener also asks himself questions before he goes to hear a speech or attends a meeting. What does he expect to hear? If he hopes to receive answers to specific questions, he will do well to have them written on a sheet of paper, with space for notes under each. Whatever his purpose in attending, he should have paper and pencil with him to jot down points that he will want to remember.

When a good reader or listener actually begins to read a report or a book, participate in a board meeting, consult with a subordinate, or listen to a speech, he firmly concentrates on the matter at hand, consciously rejecting all present or potential distractions. His attention is riveted to what is being said.

Since he needs only a small portion of his brain power to take in a message, he uses the remainder for increasing his understanding of what he is reading, seeing, or hearing. These are some of the operations he performs:

1. He sorts out and groups the materials presented, looking always for significant patterns of organization;
2. As soon as possible, he isolates the central theme, and considers how various details are related to it;
3. He looks ahead to determine the goal toward which the writer or speaker is moving;
4. He constantly reads between the lines of the message being transmitted in order to pick up subtle inference and innuendo;
5. Putting his own prejudices firmly to one side, he analyzes and weighs the evidence presented and implied to determine its validity as support for the conclusions being drawn;
6. As the argument moves from one major point to another, he reviews the essential elements so far presented in order to better understand those which will follow.

Most readers and listeners perform all of these operations intermittently. The good reader or listener performs them consciously and conscientiously.

Psychological Deterrents

The most powerful deterrents to efficient reception are emotional filters, inability to see and evaluate the structure of ideas, external distractions, and the tendency to daydream. The last two can be overcome by an effort of will—and *only* by an effort of will. A person must simply train himself to close his ears and eyes to any movement or noise which might distract him and to pull firmly on the check rein at the first sign of daydreaming. The ability to see and evaluate the structure of ideas may be developed by performing the operations indicated in the preceding paragraph.

Of all the elements which subvert good reading and good listening, emotional filters are probably the most severe, most ubiquitous, and most difficult to overcome, for they affect all messages coming into the brain. It has been repeatedly demonstrated that we tend to distort or reject without thought not only ideas which run counter to our prejudices but also facts which are brought in to support those ideas. A Democratic candidate in an election-year speech—no matter how carefully constructed his argument or how valid his evidence in the light of dispassionate examination—will not convert a confirmed Republican member of his audience. Nor will a

Republican fare better with a group of confirmed Democrats. Furthermore, what a Democrat actually hears when a candidate speaks is sometimes considerably different from what a Republican hears. Their emotional filters make this not only possible, but inevitable. More often Democrats and Republicans will disagree completely on what a candidate *means* by certain things he says. This condition is a frequent result of the common practice of permitting the mind to lie in wait for a statement which can either be vigorously attacked or staunchly advocated (depending on whether the listener is prejudiced against or in favor of the speaker's position). Fastening on this statement when it comes, the partisan listener then uses it to fan the flames of his righteous indignation while he ignores the rest of what is said. By the time the speech is over, he is prepared to demonstrate his loyalty in no uncertain terms.

Most of us are quite ready to agree that there are people who act in such an irrational way. But we assume that *we* do not do so. In reality few, if any, of us are exempt. On any subject about which we have firm convictions or in which we have been deeply involved, we face an overpowering tendency to pander to our prejudices by allowing our brains to filter out everything that we do not wish to hear and to retain only what seems advantageous to our convictions. The individual who does not believe that he is affected by this temptation should pick out an issue on which he has firm beliefs and determine honestly how dispassionately he listened to or read a recent discussion of the issue.*

Or he may play this amusing parlor game: Take five or six pictures from a magazine, cutting off any accompanying text, and mount them individually on pieces of cardboard; then hold them up one at a time and ask each person present to write down on a sheet of paper the "story" he sees in the picture. The wide variety of interpretations almost always surprises the players. A picture of a dog nosing about rows of cases in a warehouse, for example, elicited these descriptions:

> He's a trained police dog looking for hijackers hiding in the building.
>
> The warehouse is his home. He's a watchdog, about to settle down for the night. He's just looking for a place to go to sleep.
>
> He's lost and lonesome—looking for a friend.

* As one might imagine, the phrases the closed mind will uphold or attack are likely to be high on the abstraction ladder—"self-determination of nations" or "back to normalcy" or "the century of the common man," to mention only three which have been rallying cries in the past.

The scene described by the first person is tense and exciting; by the second, warm and comfortable; by the third, sad and bleak. Similarly, a picture of two boys in a boat, one standing and the other halfway over the side, meant entirely different things to two observers. The first said that the standing boy had pushed his companion; the second, that he was about to jump in to save him.

This discrepancy in interpretation holds not only for what we see with our eyes, but also for what we read and hear. Psychologists have shown conclusively that the way an individual "sees" the world is determined by his background and his inner needs. This concept—projection, as it is called—is so thoroughly established that psychologists use variations of the parlor game described above to identify people's attitudes and personality traits.

Thus the subtle and frequently inadvertent distortion of messages is perhaps the most dangerous cause of communication failure. In the world of business it costs millions of dollars every year. As a man grows older and acquires a fund of experience, he inevitably tends to feel that he has *the* answers for certain problems. Henry Ford, to take a conspicuous example, created a revolution in automobile production with his Model T. He knew what the American people wanted, and he gave it to them. But as the years went by, the people's desires changed, the economy changed. Ford's associates pleaded with him to pay more attention to the passengers' comfort in the design of his automobile. They pleaded with him to produce the Ford in a variety of colors. To both requests he turned a deaf ear. He *knew* what sold cars. To the demand for color he replied, "They can have a Ford in any color they like—as long as it's black." It was not until Chevrolet had taken away from him a large share of the low-priced market that Ford grudgingly gave way. By then, his company had lost its position of leadership in the industry.

Many another executive has his own ideas on how things should be run. He may encourage the younger men in his department to bring their new ideas to him. In some areas of his department he may enthusiastically put into operation his subordinates' suggestions. But there may well be other areas, perhaps those with which he is intimately acquainted, where his brain censors new ideas. A young man comes to him with a proposal for packaging a product in round rather than square containers. By the time the youngster has finished his first sentence, the department head has stopped listening. He knows enough about morale, of course, to *pretend* to hear the man out, but his mind is engaged in speculating about the best

time to take his vacation. After all, he has been through the mill on the round-container business. He had the same idea himself two years ago—and got his fingers badly burned. The round containers proved to be too expensive and too easily damaged in transit. So, as he thinks about his vacation, he simply does not hear the young man point out that by using a newly developed plastic the company can obtain round containers that are less expensive and far less likely to be damaged than the square ones currently in use. Since he does not hear these facts, his convictions remain unchanged. When the young man hands him the detailed memorandum he has prepared, the boss smiles and says: "That's a very interesting suggestion, Tom, but it presents some practical difficulties. Let me have the report. I'll study it carefully and talk with you again. At the moment I'm afraid I have an appointment with Mr. Barstow." So the report sits on his desk for a couple of weeks before it is returned, still unread, with the notation: "Excellent idea, but it doesn't seem practical at this time. J.C.M." And so a good suggestion dies.

These filters operate wherever self-interest or prejudice exists—even when we do not ourselves know that it exists. Every person who receives a communication has his own picture of the way his company operates and of the way it should operate. If he must pass the communication along, he alters it to fit his conception of the way things are. Thus what begins as a complaint about working conditions from a group of machinists to their foreman may become subtly altered until the president of the company hears that his men are pleased with their working conditions. By the time a workman's reasonable request for an essential testing device reaches an assistant plant superintendent, it may be transmuted by unsympathetic supervisors into a demand for unnecessarily fancy equipment.

The Responsibilities of the Audience

As these illustrations suggest, the recipient of a written or an oral report has certain responsibilities that he must fulfill if his company is to receive full value from it. After all, the company probably has made a considerable investment in any major report before it ever reaches his office. Any such communication has been given a great deal of thought by the person who prepared it. He may also have spent many hours in studying the situation on which he is reporting and in digging up data to support

his position. For this reason alone, he deserves to be given a thoughtful, sympathetic hearing.

The wise executive, therefore, will see to it that he is undisturbed as he reads or listens to the report. He will tell his secretary not to interrupt him, except for emergencies. He will allow plenty of time for a careful consideration of the material, for he knows that he cannot do justice to a report which he has to read in two parts or one which he does not have sufficient time to digest. As he reads or listens, he will concentrate all his attention and perform the six operations listed on page 326.

If he has read or listened to the report in this way and has refused to allow his own preconceptions on the subject to distort its message, by the time he reaches the end, he will have a clear picture both of the conclusions his subordinate has reached and the reasoning by which he reached them. He will have been measuring the argument against his own experience, reading between the lines both for assumptions that are not explicitly stated and for prejudices that may have led the reporter to pass over material tending to refute the argument. Having spotted each potential soft spot, he is ready almost immediately to begin asking important, searching questions —not to embarrass his subordinate, but to be certain that no consideration has been inadequately dealt with. If the report is an important one, he will probably want to go over his questions with the subordinate. If it is routine, he may wish to send it back with a request for clarification of the fuzzy points. In either situation, if he has read or listened carefully, his questions will be important ones and the subordinate will not need to be told that his report has been carefully evaluated.

A supervisor, whether he is a foreman or a president, has three additional responsibilities toward communications which come to him for action. First, he must not sit on them. Nothing is more frustrating to a subordinate (or a customer or a colleague) than to send a communication and have to wait weeks or months for a reply. If the recipient cannot read such a communication promptly, he should send a note (or have his secretary send a note) to explain why—and more important, to tell the writer when he may expect to receive his reply, "Dear Jim: I am leaving for New Mexico in a few minutes. I'll read your progress report while I'm there and let you have my comments on Monday morning." Or, "Dear Mr. Stroud: Mr. Thomas is now in New Mexico, but I will have your report on his desk when he returns on Monday. He will be very busy the early part of the week, but I should think you could expect to hear from him by Friday." Such a note assures the recipient that his communication will not be lost in

"the pile on top of the desk." Needless to say, the executive must see to it that he does give Jim his comments on Monday morning and that Mr. Stroud does hear from him by Friday.

Some executives are so impressed with the importance of not letting correspondence pile up on desks that they have established routines to guard against it. In one company, for example, a person who does not answer a letter or memorandum within three days must explain the delay to his supervisor. In another, trip reports and field-trouble reports are circulated by a central department, which logs them in and out and makes sure that delay in answering questions raised by reports, in prescribing remedies for breakdowns, in taking required action, or in filling requests is justified. An executive we know gathers up everything on the top of his desk before he leaves for the day and puts it in a drawer. This procedure forces him to sort the material the next morning. In his office, nothing can be buried at the bottom of a pile.

One of the business executive's chief complaints is that he has too much to read and that too much of what he is asked to read should never reach his desk at all. An important reason for the second complaint is the indiscriminate distribution of carbon copies. The flood of carbons occasionally requires drastic action. We know of one man, for example, who returned from a two-week vacation to find a large amount of mail waiting for him. Culling out a substantial pile of carbon copies of letters, memos, and reports, he considered it unenthusiastically for a few minutes. Then, moved by the spirit of rebellion latent in all of us, he tipped it off the edge of the desk into the wastepaper basket. Months afterwards, he was able to boast that he had not gotten into any difficulties because of the unusual way he "cleared the deck."* Though we certainly do not recommend this method of handling the problem, we can understand the executive's frustration.

In many companies, the top echelons of management have been forced to develop methods to cut down on the amount of reading required and at the same time insure that vital information is not overlooked. Some executives, for example, have trained a subordinate to summarize in two or three sentences the problems raised in an incoming letter and to indicate what decisions are involved. The summary and any materials needed to make the required decisions are clipped to the letter. If there is a file of previous correspondence, it too is attached. Thus the executive may act on the sum-

* An executive who heard the story commented succinctly, "It doesn't seem as if his job was very necessary. They ought to wipe it out and fire him." Fortunately (or unfortunately) the executive who made the remark was not the deck-clearer's boss.

mary and vital materials alone, may go on to read the letter if he wants to, or may dig further into the problem by studying the file. Other executives train their assistants to go over incoming mail and to indicate by penciling notations in the margins specific sections that they should read. At least one extremely busy—and extremely fortunate—executive relies on his secretary to tell him what to read in the *Wall Street Journal.* She goes through it and marks in red those items that will interest him. Since such secretaries are often harder to find than good executives, this procedure is not likely to become widespread.

But whatever the procedure he sets up to help him, each executive is responsible for communications addressed to him. Whether he handles them all himself or delegates others to help him, he must see that his mail is answered as rapidly as possible.

Another of the supervisor's responsibilities is to be certain that the subordinate who sent him a report knows precisely what action is taken on it. If the supervisor decides to reject a recommendation, he should indicate clearly that he is rejecting it and state his reasons for doing so. He need not go into great detail, but he must be specific. The subordinate who is simply told that his proposal is "impractical at this time" is left to wonder not only why what seems so practical to him seems impractical to the boss, but also what "at this time" may mean. On the other hand, the supervisor might tell him:

> Bob Vincent says that Sales has given your proposal a great deal of thought. They agree that the change in design would be attractive to our customers, but not enough so to offset the added 25¢ on the retail price. If we can figure out a way to manufacture the new design as inexpensively as the current one, we'll be in business. Can you solve that one?

This message not only makes it clear why he is rejecting the proposal but also challenges the subordinate to try a new approach to the problem.

If the supervisor should decide, after reading the report we have been discussing, to take some other action—to refer it to another department or to recommend the proposal to top management—he should make sure that his subordinate is informed. Once again we return to a matter we have discussed frequently in this book—consideration of the other fellow. The good supervisor knows that the longer information is withheld from a subordinate about what is happening to an important suggestion he has made or a report he has written, the more he will worry about it and the less efficiently he will perform his other tasks. So the supervisor makes every

effort to keep him precisely informed about its status. No one can be expected to maintain interest in his work when report after report disappears into the void "upstairs" and is never heard of again.

One other responsibility of the executive who receives communications calling for his action is frequently neglected in the business world. Too many executives who are annoyed by what seem to them to be inadequate, and sometimes incompetent, reports simply fume and fuss and sputter about them. When we have suggested that an executive do something about the problem, he has sometimes replied: "My job is to make decisions. I haven't got time to sit down with my department heads and teach them how to prepare their reports."

No executive, of course, should have to teach his subordinates the fundamentals of report writing. But he should show them how they can make their reports most useful to him. This he may do in a group conference with them or by writing judicious comments on individual reports. The latter will achieve considerable circulation, and before long all of the men who report to him will know that "The boss wants profit and loss figures broken down by . . ." or "J.B. likes to have engineering drawings of new motors in a folder attached to . . ." To be sure, it will take a little of J.B.'s time to help his people write more useful reports for him, but it will take far less time and energy than he would otherwise waste in fuming about them and struggling to use them despite their inadequacies. As we have pointed out elsewhere, a subordinate can seldom tell what kind of report will be most helpful to his supervisers unless he is told how it is to be used. Only in that way can he find out which aspects of the information he is supplying should be stressed and which played down.

Communication, then, is a two-way process. Successful communication requires a transmitter sending a clear signal and a receiver equipped to receive everything that is being transmitted. The human brain is an excellent receiver. With its power to reason, it not only can take in what is being transmitted, but can simultaneously analyze and evaluate it. The mind is not static; if it is well trained, it reaches out for messages and is ready to act as soon as it receives them. But this activity is not automatic. It may be subverted by emotional filters, by daydreaming, by external distractions. To these we all fall victim now and then. But the well-trained reader or listener has reduced the lapses to a minimum and has increased his own effectiveness immeasurably.

Illustrative Materials

1

The importance of good listening is pointed up by this excerpt from a report of a management survey:*

Ninety-eight percent of the management representatives were concerned about the oral communication skill of employees, particularly those in supervisory positions. Since supervisors were most frequently promoted from within the company, this meant that most employees who expected to reach a level above that of hourly paid workers need strong speech skill.

The most highly desired skills were conversational ability, listening ability, and knowledge of human relations from the speech standpoint. These are all types of abilities particularly significant in person-to-person daily contacts such as occur between a foreman and his workers. The ability to listen carefully to employees' ideas is an important supervisory skill which showed strength in the ratings.

a. *Why is listening considered a speech skill?*
b. *What sort of person finds it hard to listen?*
c. *What is likely to happen if a supervisor does not listen carefully?*

2

Problems of writing, speaking, reading, and listening are inextricably intertwined. Here is a passage from a recent book designed to increase reading efficiency. How many echoes do you find in it of ideas and material presented in earlier chapters in this book?

Kinds of Reading†

One of the marks of a good reader is the ability to adjust his reading skills to the type of material he is reading. The greater range of reading

* Irvin Gustaf Lewis, *A Survey of Managements' Attitudes Regarding Oral Communication Needs and Practices in Large Industries of Los Angeles County.* Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Southern California, May 1954, pp. 181–182.

† Lyle L. Miller, *Increasing Reading Efficiency* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1956), pp. 9–10.

efficiency he has, the greater possibilities he has for judging what types of reading skills to apply on different materials. . . . A brief consideration of the major types of reading . . . may help you to recognize some of them in practice.

SCANNING

Scanning (or skimming as it is sometimes called) is the technique of reading by the signposts—the clues set up by the author. By using these you can learn to skip materials which are not of immediate interest to you and to locate more quickly those which you really wish to read in detail. Most textbooks are organized to make intelligent skimming possible. All devices such as chapter titles, sectional headings, bold face or italicized type, and underlining are clues to help you with this technique. If you take time to think before you start to read and have a good idea of what you are looking for, these clues can save a great deal of reading time by taking you right to the sections in which you are interested and allowing you to skip the rest. Scanning can also be very effective as a preliminary step to reading something more thoroughly; it gives an overview of what you can expect in the material.

IDEA READING

Rapid reading for key ideas is essential to most business reading. The professional man who has not mastered this type of reading may find himself bogged down in his correspondence, his newspapers, his professional journals. Most correspondence includes many formal clichés and standardized expressions. The basic meaning of most articles in professional publications could be condensed into a few simple paragraphs. This reading for the main ideas is a technique of rapid reading in which the eyes move rapidly, catching large phrases at each glance, and registering with the brain only the most significant words in those phrases. Most of the rest of the words are rejected by the eyes without any attempt at the mental process of registering and remembering. Successful idea reading is perhaps one of the most difficult types of reading to master, yet it is one of the most efficient as one can develop extremely rapid rates of reading with this type. It means being familiar with the make-up of the English language as a means of communication. It necessitates recognition of key sentences and illustrative words and phrases. Rapid recognition of the skeleton structure of the

sentence is essential to discovering the basic meaning. Idea reading means making quick decisions as to the relative importance of different sentences and paragraphs as you read. It means quick recognition of the author's clues and rapid association with ideas you already understand that relate to this material.

EXPLORATORY READING

Exploratory, or general content reading, involves more detail than the two types mentioned before. This type of approach would be used for longer articles in magazines, for descriptive literature, and for light fiction. It may be used for similar reading in which we wish to get a fairly accurate picture of the whole presentation of ideas and to pick up a more thorough understanding of some new ideas. Materials on which we apply this type of reading frequently use fewer headings and clues and require reading more carefully to find the important ideas. Students would use this technique on many outside references in which they are to find background material but in which they will not be tested for detail. Emphasis here should be placed on recognizing and understanding main ideas more thoroughly and in relating them to other ideas in the article or to previous knowledge of the subject.

STUDY READING

Study reading is a type in which the reader must get a maximum understanding of the main ideas and their relationships. This is the type the student must apply to his textbooks, and the professional man must apply to his contracts, legal papers, technical manuals, instructions, and similar materials. Here he frequently deals with materials which he must read and understand *now* and also *remember for future use.* Here again clues are important and a preliminary scanning may be quite helpful, but the actual reading process needs to be an alternating activity between reading for ideas and thinking about those ideas. The actual reading process itself may be quite rapid, but greater time must be taken for detailed consideration and thinking if the ideas are to be organized in logical order and set in your mind to stay. In this type of reading one must make maximum use of such techniques as preliminary scanning, thinking and questioning oneself before reading, concentrating on small units at a time with breaks for thinking and note making between units, and reviewing of the basic

ideas after reading is completed to assure lasting understanding. Certain basic sections of the material should be identified for more careful attention through analytical reading.

CRITICAL READING

Another type of reading which must sometimes be applied wisely is that of critical reading. You may find a certain article that tends to stir you to action, such as writing to your congressman or rushing right down town to buy a new and indispensable household appliance. Then you should stop and consider what you have read more carefully. Many of our periodical articles, books, and advertising materials are loaded with carefully used propaganda devices designed to sway our opinions or to sell us on some particular idea or product. Be careful that a rapid reading of the main ideas does not lead to false conclusions.

To apply techniques of critical reading, one should go back and consider carefully what he knows about the source of the reading material and the possible biases or ulterior motives which its publisher or author might have had. He should also consider what he knows of the author and his background and knowledge of the subject. One should watch the reading material for inconsistent logic and for false analogies. Particularly important is an awareness of emotionally loaded words which appeal to basic emotions and try to stir up emotional reactions for or against something. With experience you can learn to spot some of these types of appeals through a quick scanning for the clues the author provides—then you can beware of these techniques before beginning to read. In any reading we should frequently ask ourselves: "What is the author trying to make us believe and why?"

ANALYTIC READING

Certain sections of study materials require a much more thorough type of reading than those mentioned before. Mathematical theorems and problems, scientific formulae and certain definitive statements of key ideas require careful attention to each word and to its relative importance. One must approach such reading with a questioning mind, seeking complete clarification. Fortunately materials requiring this intense concentration and deliberate thought are seldom long. You can learn to recognize such pas-

sages and to slow your reading pace to deal with such sections more adequately.

Learning to recognize different types of reading and to judge what types of reading habits to apply to them helps us to become more effective in our overall use of reading time. We streamline our reading activities to meet the needs of the time and the material. Such judgment can come only from practice. . . . You must apply the principles of efficient reading to the materials which you read every day in order to develop really efficient reading habits.

16. Speaking

Most of what we have said about good writing is applicable to good speaking as well: considering the audience, using words efficiently, avoiding rubber stamps and jargon, adjusting the level of usage to the situation, avoiding the unnecessary passive, and reflecting meaning by sentence structure and organization.

Even more than a piece of writing, a speech reflects a personality. A speaker should be extremely careful, therefore, to reflect *his own* personality and to do it justice. On public occasions, many an alert mind is obscured by traditional tired phrases or by the hail-fellow-well-met approach.

The Most Important Rule: Be Yourself

The most important advice that one can offer a speaker is to be himself. The first and most obvious reason for this suggestion is honesty. Second, unless the speaker is an excellent actor and can maintain an assumed role without betraying himself, he is safer being himself. Few of us are such capable actors. Many times speakers carry off a portrayal of someone other than themselves for half an hour or an hour—except for one small slip: an awkward gesture, perhaps, a wrong word or phrase, or an insincere laugh. Then the audience recognizes immediately that he is acting and suspects his sincerity.

Being yourself, of course, requires knowing yourself. Any student of communication, oral or written, might well begin by saying with Sophocles' Oedipus:

> . . . I ask to be no other man
> Than that I am, and *will know who I am.*

A person's attempt to discover who he is may take a significant portion of his life. We do not propose here to uncover a psychiatric couch and invite the reader to lie down. On the other hand, we do think that a speaker might appropriately ask himself questions like the following:

> Is my outstanding characteristic my integrity, my feeling of dedication, my sense of humor, my informality, my enthusiasm, my seriousness?
>
> Is my public smile a real one, or is it forced?
>
> Do I tell stories well?
>
> Are gestures natural to me?

A speaker who tends to be a serious person will probably do better by impressing his audience with his earnestness and his sense of the importance of the problem than by trying to charm them with a smile he has to paste on or a dragged-in story which obviously has nothing to do with his topic.

Any generalization about human behavior should, of course, be applied with care. Certainly some speakers put their audiences to sleep. The soporific effect, however, is generally the result of the speaker's delivery, language, or content, and not of the seriousness of his purpose. It is also true that people can learn to smile where a smile is appropriate and to tell stories that are appropriate to their own personalities—and that they probably should attempt to master such abilities. We are merely arguing that a President Eisenhower should not attempt to use the delivery of a President Truman, or vice versa; and that neither of them should attempt to speak like Franklin Roosevelt or Herbert Hoover. That may seem to be an all-too-obvious precept, but it is violated all too often.

The situation in which a speaker finds himself will, of course, also help to determine his approach. Generally the smaller the group, the more informal he can be. The better he knows the people in the audience, the more informal he can be. Few people would attempt to speak the same way at a sales dinner for ten customers as they would at a meeting of stockholders. Just as the setting for two such different functions should be dif-

ferent, so should the language. As we pointed out in Chapter 5 (Levels of Usage), Judge Learned Hand's talk—because of the nature of the speaker, the subject, and the audience—was appropriately formal. Always, then, the key to the situation is the word *appropriate*.

Planning the Speech

How then does a speaker prepare what he will say? Obviously he must first have a thorough command of his subject. If he does not, he has no business speaking. On occasion a person invited to give a talk may serve his audience best by refusing the invitation. One of our colleagues, a psychologist, was once asked to take part in a television program on mental-health problems during adolescence. He answered politely that he was not a specialist either in mental health or in adolescence, that he was not particularly interested in either (beyond, of course, the interest of the average educated person), and that he could not, therefore, appear on the program. The producer, however, brushed aside his objections and kept urging him to appear. Happily, the psychologist held out and the producer eventually arranged for someone who was qualified in the field to be present. Our colleague later commented wryly, "He didn't really care whether I knew anything about the subject. All he wanted was a body—preferably the body of a psychologist."

It is possible, of course, that our colleague might have been so interested in aiding the producer or in supporting adult education that he would have undertaken whatever study was necessary to equip himself for the appearance. As a trained psychologist, he presumably would have had considerably less work to do to become versed in the area than would an economist, let us say, or a chemist. He was unable to spend the necessary time, however, and so he quite properly refused to speak.

Let us return to the more normal situation of a person speaking in an area in which he is qualified. Even here, there is need of caution. The speaker should first of all review his subject matter. In the process, he may discover that he needs to bring his knowledge up to date in a particular area or that he needs a few more statistics to handle a particular aspect of the subject properly. The best way to tell whether one has a thorough coverage of his material is to make a quick sketch—a logical outline, perhaps, or a list of points on each of the various aspects of the subject. He

can then quite literally *see* his information laid out before him and can tell whether it is complete.

There is another advantage to this procedure. It helps the speaker to decide *what* he wants to say before he decides *how* he wants to say it. As we have seen, the two steps should be kept separate. A good bit of the confusion in speaking as well as writing comes from trying to do the two things at the same time. Laying the information out first is as necessary for a speaker as it is for a suitmaker to lay out his cloth. With everything before him, each man can then cut, match, and arrange his material to suit the needs of the individual situation. One can imagine the fit of a suit which a tailor cut as he unrolled his cloth. Yet many speakers (and writers) do just that as a first step. Some of them even try to sew the parts together at the same time.

With his material spread before him, then, the speaker is ready to prepare his talk. Here is another place where many speakers go wrong. They assume that what for them is a logical outline of a subject is also the best one for their audience. In other words, they deliver the talk from the outline or sketch they worked up for their own use.

Let us look at a few examples to make this point clear. The Jones Marine Construction Company has been invited to submit a bid on the construction of twenty-four seagoing tankers. The company would like to have the contract because it would enable them to expand into a new field. There are problems, however. In order to handle the job they would have to expand their dock facilities and deepen the channel which takes finished tankers from the shipyards out to the ocean. The estimator assigned to the job has been told that he must make an oral report to the Operating Committee in ten days. On the basis of his report, the committee will decide whether the company will submit a bid.

Whether the estimator is to report to the Operating Committee or to submit a bid to the oil company, he must first collect and organize his information. When he gets a clear picture, he is ready to prepare his oral report. He probably has it organized something like this:

Cost of building tankers	**$________**	
(broken down in some detail)		
Cost of extending dock facilities	**$________**	
Cost of deepening channel	**$________**	
Total cost		**$________**
Estimate of competitors' bids		**$________**
Difference		**$________**

His outline reflects the organization of the materials which he has in his mind and to some extent the way in which he gathered his data.

The Operating Committee, however, will want the last item first. Their problem is to determine whether costs for the docks and the channel can be held down enough to allow them to meet competitive bidding. They are willing to take the contract without any profit or even at a small loss in order to expand into the new field. The "Difference" then is the crucial item for them. If it is in favor of their competitors, but very slightly so, they will know at once that they can probably get the contract by taking a certain loss. If the difference in favor of their competitors is large enough to give them pause, they will then want to study the various costs to see where they can trim costs or take short cuts. They may even ask for a breakdown of the figures and work over them a few days. If the difference is overwhelmingly in favor of their competitors, they may decide against the project immediately and settle the issue in a few minutes, leaving the estimator to trudge back to his office with several pages of unreported figures.

If the Operating Committee decides to bid for the contract, the estimator must use his original outline (perhaps amended slightly as a result of the decisions of the Operating Committee) to write up the bid. The same figures, then, may be used in three different patterns for three different audiences: first, for the estimator to get a picture of the situation; second, for the estimator to give his oral report so that the Operating Committee can decide whether to bid for the contract; and third, for the estimator to write up the report.

If the same man were invited to lecture to a college class in engineering analysis and chose to use this particular example as the basis for what he said, he would probably fashion his figures into still another pattern. He would not need to report them in detail—as he had been prepared to do for the Operating Committee. He would probably need to arrange an introduction so that the students, who were not familiar with the Jones Company and had had little practical experience, would understand the figures. And he would need to select them on a different principle and to arrange them with a different emphasis from that used in the bid.

Here is one more example. An oil executive has just returned from a two-year tour of duty in the Middle East. During his first month at home, he is asked to give four talks: to a select gathering of officials in the home office of his company; to a convention of petroleum engineers; to the local Foreign Policy Association; and to the local Parent-Teacher Association. If he is to do a good job for each group, he will have to prepare and deliver

four entirely different talks, even though he will be talking about "the same thing" in each: his experiences in the Middle East. His four audiences will arrive with different interests, different understandings, and different training. Should he also be asked to address a group which has a strong emotional attachment to Israel, he would have still another matter to consider in preparing a fifth talk.

Now for the talk itself. How should it be delivered? If it is highly technical and the speaker must take pains to be precise, or if it is on a sensitive topic and the speaker wants to be very sure that he is not misunderstood, he may write it out in advance and deliver it exactly as it is written. Actually such precision is seldom necessary, though many insecure speakers like to insist that for them it *is* necessary. Most people feel safer reading a speech. But they should not delude themselves. Only a person with long training and much experience can read a talk successfully. Most speech readers fail miserably and only manage to bore their audiences. Similarly, few speakers ever find themselves in a situation which really calls for memorizing a talk; and those who try to do so find that committing to memory a talk of more than four or five minutes is a tedious and time-consuming chore. Furthermore, few people other than trained actors can deliver a memorized talk without sounding mechanical.

Manuscript or Notes?

If a person must read his speech, he should prepare his text for easy delivery. That usually means avoiding long and involved sentences which depend heavily on punctuation for their clarity. It also means taking care not to be trapped into using phrases that are appropriate in a typed or printed text but not in a speech, either because of their reference to the medium ("As I indicated above . . .") or because of their formality.

Most good speakers use notes. They may prepare these notes in several different ways, depending upon what has proved useful to them. Some, for example, write out their talks and carry the typescript to the rostrum with key words or phrases underlined in red pencil. They plan to look only at the underlined phrases. Although an occasional speaker uses this system successfully, it has serious dangers. First, it is not easy to keep one's place in such a manuscript. Second, there is a constant temptation to read instead of delivering the talk informally.

Most teachers of public speaking recommend that notes be typed on 3 × 5 or 4 × 6 cards. In that form, they can be carried in a pocket until needed and can be manipulated easily. Many speakers, however, prefer to have their notes on standard 8½ × 11 paper. They feel that the advantage of being able to see what comes next outweighs the possible advantages in handling and storing the smaller cards.

Whether one reads or speaks from notes, however, he should take certain precautions in arranging his material on each page or card so that it may be easily used. In the first place, he must remember that it will be considerably farther from his eyes than the normal reading distance. The type, therefore, should be dark and distinct. Manuscripts for reading should be double-spaced, or, if necessary, triple-spaced. Ordinary punctuation rules may be largely ignored in favor of a punctuation system which clearly indicates appropriate pauses and emphases. Conventional punctuation marks are often supplemented with single, double, and triple diagonal lines to group words for proper delivery, and with underlining (single and double) and capitalization of whole words or phrases to indicate appropriate degrees of emphasis. A sample page from a manuscript marked in this way is on page 346.

Material should never be crammed into inadequate space or allowed to pile up at the end of a page or card. Adequate margins should be maintained so that each line can be picked up properly with a normal sweep of the eye and so that there is room for jotting down the impromptu last-minute thoughts that often improve a talk.

A speaker should not hold his manuscript or notes in his hand. They distract the audience. If he is a little nervous, they greatly magnify a slight tremor of his hand. He should place his manuscript or notes in front of him, preferably on a lectern which has a top tilted at the proper angle for reading. Once he sets them down, he should leave them alone, except to turn pages or cards. A speaker who absent-mindedly riffles pages or taps cards distracts and irritates the audience.

Facing the Audience

When a speaker uses a lectern, he should be careful to stand several inches behind it. If he stands so close that it touches his body, he will find

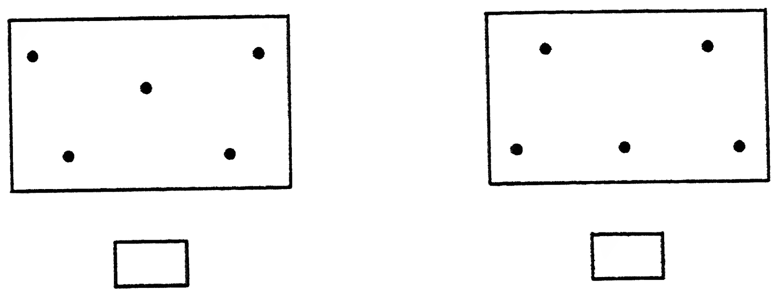
in this city. The mayor and councilmen have said, not once but many times, that no increase in school construction will be possible unless one of two things happens: the state votes additional funds or the citizens of this community vote themselves an additional tax burden. Two years ago we were asked to express our will on the second of these two alternatives. The result? Overwhelming defeat. Last year the mayor and your local representatives went up to the capital and pleaded with the legislature to provide state funds. The result? Again overwhelming defeat.

The question that confronts us today, therefore, is: Where do we go from here? Where can we who are vitally concerned with the educational opportunities of the children of this community turn for support in our effort to secure adequate facilities and the best available instruction? Support must come either from the state or from the community. Clearly we -- you and I -- can have a far greater influence on the thinking of the community than on that of legislators who represent hundreds of communities around the state, each of which has its own problems and

himself looking directly downward at his manuscript or notes, an angle of vision that takes him out of contact with the audience for too long, makes it harder for him to keep his place, and throws his voice down into his throat.

When he approaches the lectern, the speaker should already have examined the room and picked out four or five individuals in different spots, several of them at or toward the back. If he talks directly to these

people, he will be heard by everyone. If the room is unusually wide, he need not rotate from side to side. If his voice is loud and distinct enough, he need only turn his head slightly in one direction or the other to be heard clearly throughout the room. He should avoid giving the impression that he is watching a tennis match.



Two Patterns for Spotting People

Looking at particular individuals in the audience also forces a speaker to realize that he is talking to people and not delivering his material to an unresponsive set of nonentities. Thus his talk becomes warmer and more personal. He finds himself reacting to facial expressions. He begins to communicate effectively and his efforts give greater satisfaction both to himself and to his audience.

But he should not allow himself to be so carried away that he loses track of time. Every speaker should be time conscious. If there is no clock in the room that he can see easily, he should remove his watch before he begins to talk and place it where he can glance at it from time to time. A speaker who hauls a watch out of his pocket or pulls back his sleeve every minute or so continually distracts his listeners.

Few things are more annoying to an audience than the speaker who talks longer than he is supposed to. Such poor planning or deliberate disregard of arrangements is not only rude, but it also embarrasses the chairman of the program, who must call the infraction to the speaker's attention; it may force the audience to stay beyond the time they had expected and embarrass especially those in the front of the room who must leave for other appointments. If there are other speakers on the program, it may eat up some of their time.*

* When a speaker continues beyond his allotted time, the chairman of the program should stop him. If a discreet note telling him that he has run overtime does no good, the chairman should rise and repeat the warning, quietly and politely—but firmly. On occasion,

There is no excuse, of course, for the person who reads his speech to exceed his allotted time, for he has ample opportunity to run through his speech beforehand at the speed he plans to use before his audience. He should work over his materials until he can fit everything comfortably into the designated period. Then, reading the speech once more, he can jot down in red at the top of every other page a figure (9:15, 9:22, 9:27, etc.) indicating the time when he should reach that page. Thus, if at 9:25 he arrives at the page marked 9:27, he will know that he can slow down a bit if he wishes or can reinstate a minor point he had reluctantly cut from his text. If he arrives there at 9:31, he will have to speed up and perhaps drop an illustration he had planned to use. (If there is no precise hour when he is to start his speech, he can, of course, keep a check on his progress by indicating on every other page how many minutes he should have used to get there—two minutes, five minutes, and so on.) A similar procedure may be used with note cards. Indeed it is far more important to the man who speaks from notes than to the reader of manuscript, for he may easily use up time with digressions or get ahead of himself by following the skeleton on his cards too closely. A time scheme worked out in advance and clearly indicated on the cards will constantly remind him that he has an obligation to complete his job on time.

Whether speaking from a manuscript or from notes, many speakers polish their delivery by tape recording their talks. Even the experienced speaker finds such trial runs useful on occasion. They give a good indication of the time the talk will take, familiarize him with the material as no silent reading can, and allow him to discover and weed out tongue twisters and phrases that may look fine in print but do not sound quite right when read aloud. A tape recording also gives him a chance to check speed, emphasis, and the sound of his voice.

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it may take a salvo of cannon to stop an inconsiderate speaker, but the chairman owes it to the audience to do so. Here is how one of our colleagues recently handled the speakers on a panel. Taking his cue from the convention chairman, he included in his letter about arrangements to each of the panelists the following paragraph: "From Mr. Allen's letter, I gather that my principal jobs are to introduce you and 'to insist ruthlessly and without exception that each speaker finish *on time.*' I promise to be 'ruthless' about time." He met with all the panelists briefly before they appeared and arranged to give a two-minute warning to those who wanted it. His demeanor, his good-humored frankness about his intentions, and his offer of help convinced the group that he was serious about time. They all kept within their allotted limits.

Controlling Nervousness

Inexperienced speakers often feel that they should not be nervous, that there is something weak or amateurish about it. Seasoned speakers, however, disagree. Although experience does make for ease of delivery, very few speakers ever approach an assignment without qualms. Most veteran actors and actresses admit to first-night jitters. Many of them frankly confess to being so frightened that they are sure they will not be able to go on. Once the curtain goes up, however, they are all right. The same is true for most public speakers. Nervous in anticipation of the job ahead, they perform admirably once they are doing it. Actually some nervousness can be a good thing. A speaker who is blasé about what he is doing may very well give a blasé talk—or a confused one. Nervousness, on the other hand, frequently provides the extra energy needed for projecting the voice farther than is necessary in regular conversation and for making the gestures that everyday speaking does not require. Hence, nervousness should not be avoided but controlled and turned to the speaker's advantage.

There are several ways of bringing nervousness under control. It often causes tension in the facial muscles, especially those controlling the eyes and tongue. As he awaits his turn to speak, therefore, a speaker should consciously attempt to relax them. Many speakers make a practice of blinking their eyes and yawning as they wait to appear before an audience.

Once at the lectern, the speaker should arrange his watch and notes, if they are not already in place. Then he should stand several inches behind the lectern, where he can see his notes by merely dropping his eyes. Finally—and perhaps this is the most important step of all—he should pause to look briefly at his audience. The pause informs them that he is about to begin. It gives them a chance to clear their throats, rearrange their legs, settle back in their seats, and do all the other little things that audiences seem to have to do when they are about to be addressed. Since it also suggests to them that the speaker is thoroughly in command of the situation, they automatically allow themselves to relax. If he does not pause to look at his audience, they become tense: knowing he is ill at ease, they feel embarrassed for him. For the speaker himself, this brief moment is invaluable; it gives him the opportunity to settle his feet, square his shoulders, and raise his head. It also prevents him from rushing into his talk, an error which almost always causes him to stumble over his first sentence, creating

an unfavorable first impression and markedly increasing his self-conscious nervousness. If he feels that under the pressure of the moment he is likely to forget to pause and place himself correctly, he should include a reminder at the head of his notes. Poise can be developed by conscious effort, and a speaker who appears poised starts off with a great advantage.

Humor

Many a speaker tries to "prove" that he is at ease by starting off with a "good story." "I'll show 'em I'm pretty comfortable up here," he thinks to himself, "and at the same time I'll loosen 'em up a little." So he begins, "My subject tonight reminds me of . . ." or "What your chairman just said reminds me of a joke I heard once from old Joe Smith. . . ." Too often, however, the joke is poorly told, has nothing to do with the topic at hand, and takes far too much time. His listeners are left wondering why the speaker bothered to tell it. They begin to suspect that he probably doesn't have much to say, knows it, and is trying to get them on his side before making what showing he can.

Humor is effective when it arises naturally as the talk unfolds. The audience can very easily tell the difference between wit that stems from the speaker's good-humored or satiric approach to his subject and wit that is superficial. Every speaker must look to his integrity. If he has accepted an invitation to speak on a subject of which he has special knowledge, he should not assume that his audience primarily wants to be amused. If he suspects that the audience is really interested in being amused, he should refuse the invitation—unless he wants to try his hand at being an amateur comedian. We are not opposed to humor in a talk. Properly employed, it can be a very effective tool. Many speakers use it masterfully. But humor should not overshadow the subject matter, should not be dragged in irrelevantly, and should not be used in lieu of content—it *should* be appropriate.

Audio-visual Aids

Another effective tool is the audio-visual aid. Machines which project sound alone seldom find their way to a speaker's platform, although on cer-

tain occasions a tape recorder is useful to demonstrate sounds that are to be discussed. Aids that are truly audio-visual are used more often. The commonest are motion pictures with sound tracks and film strips with accompanying records. Even these, however, are used more often as substitutes for a speaker than as aids. After all, the most effective visual aid is the speaker himself.

The aids most commonly used by speakers are visual: graphs, maps, charts, pictures, drawings, and printed passages. These may be projected on a screen; they may be drawn or lettered on a blackboard, or on cards or sheets of paper to be held up before the audience, displayed on a flannel board, or reproduced and distributed. They have many advantages. A speaker can often show an audience something much more efficiently than he can tell them about it. Or at least showing *and* telling may prove to be more successful than either method by itself. A single curve on a graph, for example, can often tell what has happened to sales or the cost of living or government expenditures over a period of years, or describe fuel consumption in a particular engine under varying loads much more simply and quickly than can words alone.

Manufacturers of various kinds of projectors are becoming increasingly ingenious at developing ways of helping speakers explain complex subjects. There is, for example, the "dynamic" slide (as opposed to the "static" slide) for use with certain kinds of projectors: it allows a speaker to build up or take apart a composite image, adding or subtracting sections as suits his purpose. The "dynamic" slide is a standard slide with transparent overlays hinged at the edges. Each overlay has a portion of the complete picture on it. Folding it over the face of the slide adds what is drawn on the overlay to what is already being projected on the screen. Colors can be used to emphasize or distinguish between different lines, curves, points, sections, or words.

Let us assume, for example, that the transportation manager of a company has been invited to discuss his major problems before a meeting of the board of directors. With a "dynamic" slide he can very easily demonstrate an important aspect of his problem. He may first project on the screen an outline map of the United States which shows the company's plants in blue and its chief customers' in red. After talking about them for a few moments, he may add an overlay showing available rail lines in black. Later he may add another overlay showing the navigable rivers in green, a third showing the airlines in orange, and a fourth showing the major

truck routes by means of dotted purple lines. These overlays may be applied in any order so that a particular mode of transportation can be examined separately or in relation to any or all of the others.

In the use of visual aids, however, there are several dangers. Too frequently they are used for their own sake, to demonstrate that the speaker is "up" on the newest gadget or the latest teaching technique. Furthermore, they should be used as an aid to audience understanding of matters not easily explained in words, not as a prop or a substitute for the speaker or to hide the fact that he does not have anything to say. If our traffic manager concludes, for example, that the best way to ship a particular product is by truck because trucking is fast, safe, and easily adaptable to the peculiar needs of the product, he should simply say so. Too often in such circumstances a speaker insults the intelligence of his audience by flashing on a screen:

Trucking is . . .
FAST . . .
SAFE . . .
EASILY ADAPTABLE

He then demonstrates confidence in the intellectual power of his audience by reading the contents of the card to them. Many a "speaker" actually does little more than present a series of charts and read them aloud. No procedure puts an audience to sleep more rapidly. It is possible that such a method enables them to remember more than if only a few judiciously chosen visual aids were used—although we doubt it very much. Even though the "now I'll show it to you, now I'll read it to you" technique may leave more information with the audience, it also leaves with them the impression that the speaker was talking "down" to them.

A speaker should use his visual aids smoothly. He should either see that the operator knows just when each slide should be shown or arrange for an unobtrusive signal to indicate a slide change. He should talk ahead of each slide or chart and bring each one easily into his speech. He should not have to pause, ask for a slide, and then explain it. The visual aid, after all, is presented for the sake of the talk, not the talk for the visual aid. If any pointing is required, it should be done with a pointer long enough so that the speaker can indicate any item on the screen, chart, or board without having to cover it with his body. (Some speakers prefer a flashlight to a pointer. By fastening a stencil of an arrow over the glass, they produce an arrow-shaped beam of light with which they can point.) He should be

careful also to face his audience and not his visual aid. A speaker using a blackboard, for example, often turns his back to the audience and talks to the board. As a result, they cannot hear what he is saying. Charts, flannel boards, or blackboards should always be kept covered until needed. Once used, they should be covered again, if possible. Exposed charts or figures distract the audience.

In determining how large his charts or screened images should be, the speaker should consider the size of the room. A diagram, picture, or sentence which the spectators can barely see is often worse than no visual aid at all. He should also be careful not to crowd too much material on a single card or slide, particularly at the beginning, when the information is new. As his approach and his material become clearer, he may increase the amount of information on each visual aid. It is usually best, however, even toward the end, to limit the material on a slide to a single idea or concept. For complex ideas, "dynamic" slides and charts are very useful because they show how a concept grows in complexity.

The principles of good speaking, then, are having one's material firmly in hand and delivering it to fit the needs of the audience, matching one's delivery to his personality, and calling on whatever aids are necessary to accomplish one's purpose. If a speaker is honest with himself and with his audience, the integrity he projects will be more effective than any "gimmick" he can employ.

Illustrative Materials

1

A classic discussion of a common failing among speakers is John Davenport's "Slurvian Self-Taught" :*

Listening to a well-known Hollywood radio commentator some time back, I heard her say that she had just returned from a Yerpeen trip, and had had a lovely time nittly. I at once recognized her as an accomplished Slurvian linguist and, being a student of Slurvian, readily understood that

* Reprinted by permission of the author. Originally published in *The New Yorker*, June 18, 1949. Copyright © 1949 by The New Yorker Magazine, Inc.

she had just returned from a European trip, and while there (in Yerp) had had a lovely time in Italy.

Slurvian is coming into common use in the United States, but I am, so far as I know, the only scholar to have made a start toward recording it. There is no official written Slurvian language, but it is possible, by means of phonetic spelling, for me to offer a brief course of instruction in it. In a short time, the student can learn enough to add immeasurably to his understanding and enjoyment of conversation wherever he travels in the country.

I first heard pure Slurvian fluently spoken by a co-worker of mine who told me that his closest friend was a man named Hard (Howard). Hard was once in an automobile accident, his car, unfortunately, cliding with another, causing Hard's wife Dorthy, who was with him, to claps. Dorthy didn't have much stamina but was a sweet woman—sweet as surp.

I soon discovered I had an ear for Slurvian, and since I began to recognize the language, I have encountered many Slurvians. At ballparks, they keep track of hits, runs, and airs. On farms, they plow furs. In florist shops, they buy flars. When hard up, they bar money from banks, and spend it for everything from fewl for the furnace to grum crackers for the children.

When Slurvians travel abroad, they go to visit farn (or forn) countries to see what the farners do that's different from the way we Murcans do things. While in farn countries, they refer to themselves as Murcan tersts, and usually say they will be mighty glad to get back to Murca. A Slurvian I once met on a train told me he had just returned from a visit to Mexico. He deplored the lack of automobiles down there, and said that the natives ride around on little burrs.

A linguistic authority of my acquaintance, much interested in my work in Slurvian, has suggested to me the possibility that the language may be related to, or a variation of, the one still spoken in England of which such a contraction as "Chumley," for "Cholmondeley," is a familiar example. However, I think the evidence insufficient for drawing such a conclusion. Surnames cannot be considered subject to the ordinary rules of pronunciation. In fact, the only one I have positively identified in Slurvian is Faggot, the name of the American admiral who won the Battle of Mobile Bay.

The name Faggot brings me to a discussion of what I designate as "pure" Slurvian. This includes those Slurvian words that, when spelled exactly as pronounced, also make good English words (such as "Faggot,"

"burr," and "claps"). The day I can add to the lexicon such a word, hitherto unrecorded, is a happy day for me. Here are some examples of pure Slurvian, alphabetically listed:

bean, *n.* A living creature, as in *human bean.*

cactus, *n. pl.* The people in a play or story.

course, *n.* A group of singers.

fiscal, *adj.* Pertaining to the body, as opposed to the spurt.

form, *n.* Gathering place of the ancient Romans.

gnome, *n.* Contraction for *no, Ma'am. Colloq.*

line, *n.* The king of beasts.

lore, *n.* The more desirable of the two berths in a Pullman section.

myrrh, *n.* A looking glass.

par, *n.* An attribute of strength, as in *the par and the glory.*

plight, *adj.* Courteous.

sears, *adj.* Grave, intent.

sport, *v.t.* To hold up, to bear the weight of.

wreckers, *n. pl.* Discs on which music is recorded for phonographs.

* * *

Let me close with a final example, to make my meaning clear. Wherever you may be in the United States, if you hear the word "tare," the speaker probably is not referring to a Biblican weed growing in the wheat. More likely, he is describing the sensation of extreme fear experienced by a movie fan watching Borse Karloff in a harr picture.

2

Jargon, as we saw in Chapter 4, is present in much business writing. In his speeches, the businessman is likely to use an even larger percentage of jargon, trite phrasing, and standard metaphors than in his letters. Each profession, we know, has its own jargon. So does each company. One special type we may call "informal speech jargon." It is found in most speeches in which businessmen attempt informality. It pretends to be direct and forceful; actually, like all jargon, it serves only to obscure a kernel of meaning by burying it in a mountain of words. Notice how little the speaker really has to say in the following, reprinted from Fortune*:

* Reprinted from the November 1950 issue of *Fortune* Magazine by Special Permission; Copyright 1950 by Time Inc.

The Composite Business Speech

(This is not a parody. It is a loose compilation, based on a systematic count of the expressions and constructions most commonly used in current U.S. business speeches. Included are sixty principal clichés of reverse gobbledegook.)

COOPERATION—AN OPPORTUNITY AND A CHALLENGE

An Address

It is a pleasure and a privilege to be here with you today. These great annual meetings are always an inspiration to me, and doubly so today. After the glowing introduction by our toastmaster I must confess, however, that I'd like to turn the tables and tell a little story on Chuck. When I say it's about the nineteenth hole and a certain gentleman whose baritone was cracked, those of you who were at the Atlanta conference last year will know what I mean. But I won't tell it. Chuck Forbes is too good a friend of mine, and seriously, I know full well we all realize what a tower of strength his yeoman service has been to the association in these trying times.

Yes, gentlemen, trying times. So you'll pardon me if I cast aside the glib reverberation of glittering generalities and the soothing syrup of sugar-coated platitudes and put it to you the only way I can: straight English.

We're losing the battle:

From every corner the people are being weaned from the doctrines of the Founding Fathers. They are being detoured from the high-speed highway of progress by the utopian highwaymen.

Now, the man in the street is a pretty savvy fellow. Don't sell him short. Joe Doakes may be fooled for a while, but in the end he wants no part of the mumbo jumbo the global saboteurs are trying to sell him. After all, he is an American.

But he has to be told.

And we're not telling him!

Now let me say that I do not wish to turn the clock back. None of us do. All forward-looking businessmen see themselves as partners in a team in which the worker is a full-fledged member. I regard our employees as our greatest business asset, and I am sure, mindful as I am of the towering potentials of purposeful energy in this group of clear-sighted leaders, that, in the final analysis, it is the rock foundation of your policies too.

But the team can't put the ball across for a first down just by wishing it. The guards and the tackles can't do their job if the quarterback doesn't let them in on the play. And we, the quarterbacks, are muffing the ball.

How are we to go over for a touchdown? My friends, this is the $64 question. I don't know the answers. I am just a plain-spoken businessman. I am not a soothsayer. I have no secret crystal ball. But I do know one thing: before we round the curve into the homestretch we have a job to do. It will not be easy. I offer no panaceas or nostrums. Instead, I would like to suggest that the real key to our problem lies in the application of the three *E*'s.

What are the three *E*'s?

ENTERPRISE! ENDEAVOR! EFFORT!

Each and every one of us must appoint himself a salesman—yes a missionary, if you will—and get out and do some real grassroots selling. And when we hit the dirt, let's not forget the customers—the greatest asset any business has.

Now, much has been done already. But let's not fool ourselves: the surface, as our chairman has so wisely said, has hardly been scratched. The program is still in its infancy. So let me give it to you straight from the shoulder. The full implementation, gentlemen, depends on *us*.

So let's get on the beam! In cracker-barrel fashion, let's get down to earth. In good plain talk the man in the street can understand, let's remind Joe Doakes that the best helping hand he will ever find is the one at the end of his own shirt sleeve.

We have the know-how.

With sights set high, let's go over the top!

3

Introducing a speaker is a pleasant task which all of us have to perform from time to time. We may, of course, settle for a routine summary of the speaker's career, full of dates and offices and prizes and honors. Or we may produce a witty, good-humored introduction which will win friends for everyone and whet the audience's appetite for the speech to come.

On April 6, 1951, Mr. Thomas H. Coulter, president of the Executives' Club of Chicago, presented to the club Mr. Lee Wulff, photographer and sportsman. Although his introduction is longer than we would normally recommend, we are reproducing it here because

it provides an extended demonstration of several points made in the chapter.*

About thirty million of us spend enough time each year to make fishing the greatest outdoor sport in America. After a few days, or even a few hours, we then proceed to make fishing the greatest indoor sport, half-lying about what we caught and full-lying about what we almost caught.

Up until five years ago, when Lee Wulff made his first appearance at our Club, establishing himself as an annual "must" on our program, I had done practically no fishing, and felt I was definitely out of the swim of things because I couldn't lie socially about my exploits with rod and reel.

Lee and his inspiring pictures thrilled me so that I resolved to become a fisherman at once. He made fishing look so easy, I was sure I could do it at least as well, and thereby acquire a social grace that would require little, if any, prevarication.

Since that time, I have made a substantial investment in various type rods, reels, and accessories and a tremendous investment in animal, vegetable, and mineral matter to fasten on the end of my fishing lines. These materials, commonly referred to as bait or lures, may be living, dead, embalmed, wired with electricity, equipped with sound, and even made to glow in the dark under water. They also may be any shape, size, color, or cost, and resemble anything you've ever heard of, either living or dead.

My favorite so-called lure is a plastic figure of a blonde nude done in beautiful natural colors, having hooks attached at appropriate places, in as neat an assembly as you ever could hope to see. Each time when I reel her in without hooking a fish—which is normal—I'm somehow not quite so disappointed as I usually am with a pork rind or some feathers and stuff.

Faithfully for the past five years I have boated, waded, and even swum after every kind of fish alleged to inhabit waters within twenty-five hundred miles of Chicago. My record is such that I feel I must report to you my observations about fishing, so that you will not be carried away by Mr. Wulff as I was, and make rash investments of time, money, and energy in pursuit of fish, game, fame—and famine, if you don't take enough grub along with you.

First: Fishing tackle manufacturers are engaged in a syndicated conspiracy to swindle honest fishermen into making unsound investments in gear they do not need, cannot use, and which is entirely unattractive to fish.

* From *I Am Happy to Present,* edited by Guy R. Lyle and Kevin Guinagh (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1953), pp. 255–257. Reprinted with the permission of the publisher and *Executives' Club News.*

They should all be investigated by Senator Kefauver, registered with the SEC, and made to file a prospectus on their baits and lures.

This should limit the marketing of bait to live minnows, worms, and salmon eggs in interstate commerce.

Second: All Florida real-estate promoters, who fleeced the public in the land boom of the twenties, now operate charter boats at Pier 5 in Miami, offering round trips to fame and fortune in the Gulf Stream, at much higher fees than they ever got for dry land.

Third: Fishing is a disease. It is very contagious, and there is no known cure. It requires a change of climate at least once a year, preferably in remote areas under constant nursing care from a skilled "psychologist," commonly known as a guide.

Fourth: A successful fishing expedition need not require fish. As a matter of fact, the anticipation, preparation, travel, drinking, and lying, in themselves alone, offer enough enchantment to perpetuate the sport indefinitely.

And last: Lee Wulff is the greatest fisherman and all-round outdoor man in the world. He is so successful at hunting and fishing that he gave up a promising career in engineering and design to make sports his life's work. It also works for him—his writing, art, movies, lectures, and, I'm sorry to say, lures, make it possible for him to enjoy a perpetual sporting holiday.

All things considered, he's about the smartest man I know. The only thing he lacks is a good, experienced liar, and I've applied for the job.

Having just returned from Florida where my total catch was three, one-half-pound non-edible fish I shall now reel in and let the "Old Master" once again show us how it's done.

Mr. Lee Wulff, please cast.

a. *What is the tone of this introduction?*

b. *List all of the devices used in this introduction.*

c. *Practice reading this introduction, trying to observe the suggestions made in this chapter. If possible, use a rostrum and try to duplicate the setting for a speech. If you have access to a tape recorder, put the introduction on tape. Study your performance carefully and try to improve on it by recording the speech again. Continue this cycle until you are satisfied with your performance.*

4

Many people do not realize how little expression they put into their voice when they speak before a group. Try this experiment to

see what you can do with your voice. Take a tape recorder into a room which you can have to yourself and close the door. Familiarize yourself with the excerpt below so that you will be able to read it aloud without stumbling.*

A hatless general pulled his dripping horse to a stand near the colonel of the 304th. He shook his fist in the other's face. "You've got to hold 'em back!" he shouted, savagely; "you've got to hold 'em back!"

In his agitation the colonel began to stammer. "A-all r-right, General, all right, by Gawd! We-we'll do our—we'we'll d-d-do—do our best, General." The general made a passionate gesture and galloped away. The colonel, perchance to relieve his feelings, began to scold like a wet parrot. The youth, turning swiftly to make sure that the rear was unmolested, saw the commander regarding his men in a highly resentful manner, as if he regretted above everything his association with them.

The man at the youth's elbow was mumbling, as if to himself: "Oh, we're in for it now! oh, we're in for it now!"

The captain of the company had been pacing excitedly to and fro in the rear. He coaxed in schoolmistress fashion, as to a congregation of boys with primers. His talk was an endless repetition. "Reserve your fire, boys—don't shoot till I tell you—save your fire—wait till they get close up—don't be damned fools——"

Perspiration streamed down the youth's face, which was soiled like that of a weeping urchin. He frequently, with a nervous movement, wiped his eyes with his coat sleeve. His mouth was still a little way open.

He got the one glance at the foe-swarming field in front of him, and instantly ceased to debate the question of his piece being loaded. Before he was ready to begin—before he had announced to himself that he was about to fight—he threw the obedient, well-balanced rifle into position and fired a first wild shot. Directly he was working at his weapon like an automatic affair.

He suddenly lost concern for himself, and forgot to look at a menacing fate. He became not a man but a member. He felt that something of which he was a part—a regiment, an army, a cause, or a country—was in a crisis. He was welded into a common personality which was dominated by a single desire. For some moments he could not flee, no more than a little finger can commit a revolution from a hand.

If he had thought the regiment was about to be annihilated perhaps he

* From Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage* (New York: Modern Library), pp. 62–67.

could have amputated himself from it. But its noise gave him assurance. The regiment was like a firework that, once ignited, proceeds superior to circumstances until its blazing vitality fades. It wheezed and banged with a mighty power. He pictured the ground before it as strewn with the discomfited.

There was a consciousness always of the presence of his comrades about him. He felt the subtle battle brotherhood more potent even than the cause for which they were fighting. It was a mysterious fraternity born of the smoke and danger of death.

He was at a task. He was like a carpenter who has made many boxes, making still another box, only there was furious haste in his movements. He, in his thought, was careering off in other places, even as the carpenter who as he works whistles and thinks of his friend or his enemy, his home or a saloon. And these jolted dreams were never perfect to him afterward, but remained a mass of blurred shapes.

Presently he began to feel the effects of the war atmosphere—a blistering sweat, a sensation that his eyeballs were about to crack like hot stones. A burning roar filled his ears.

Following this came a red rage. He developed the acute exasperation of a pestered animal, a well-meaning cow worried by dogs. He had a mad feeling against his rifle, which could only be used against one life at a time. He wished to rush forward and strangle with his fingers. He craved a power that would enable him to make a world-sweeping gesture and brush all back. His impotency appeared to him, and made his rage into that of a driven beast.

Buried in the smoke of many rifles his anger was directed not so much against the men whom he knew were rushing toward him as against the swirling battle phantoms which were choking him, stuffing their smoke robes down his parched throat. He fought frantically for respite for his senses, for air, as a babe being smothered attacks the deadly blankets.

There was a blare of heated rage mingled with a certain expression of intentness on all faces. Many of the men were making low-toned noises with their mouths, and these subdued cheers, snarls, imprecations, prayers, made a wild, barbaric song that went as an undercurrent of sound, strange and chantlike with the resounding chords of the war march. The man at the youth's elbow was babbling. In it there was something soft and tender like the monologue of a babe. The tall soldier was swearing in a loud voice. From his lips came a black procession of curious oaths. Of a sudden another

broke out in a querulous way like a man who has mislaid his hat. "Well, why don't they support us? Why don't they send supports? Do they think——"

The youth in his battle sleep heard this as one who dozes hears.

Turn on the tape recorder and read the passage with as much expression as you can muster: "ham it up"; give it everything. Now listen to the tape.

a. *Did you really put as much expression into the reading as you thought you had?*

b. *How close did you come to giving the passage its due?*

c. *Was there any variation in the intensity of your voice? In the pitch? In the volume?*

d. *Leave the first reading on the tape. Read and record the passage again, trying to make your interpretation as meaningful and effective as possible. Compare the two readings for improvement.*

17. Communicating in Group Discussion

Before a supervisor calls a group together for a meeting of any kind, he should consider very carefully what he wants to accomplish. Does he want to tell them something? Does he want them to explore a problem? Or does he want them to reach a decision? Meetings for different purposes must be planned differently and must be conducted differently.

Information Meetings

Let us assume, for example, that a company's board of directors has decided to build a new plant. Just as the information on which the decision was based came up through the various levels of the company, so the decision itself must go down—and be translated into action as it goes. At each level the decision or a relevant aspect of the decision must be set out as carefully as possible so that there will be no misunderstanding. Too often trouble in carrying out plans comes from poor communication of policy.

The person running a meeting should prepare himself to announce the company's decision. He is responsible for seeing that his group carries away precisely the appropriate type and amount of information. He must

see to it that they know all that they should know at their level in the company and that information is so presented that they can understand what is to be done and what it will mean to them. He must also relay the information in such a way that he allays unnecessary doubts about its effectiveness and wins the support of all of the people on whom the success of the new project depends.

If each supervisor performs his assignment well, the decision to build a new plant will be transmitted to middle management in one way and to foremen in another. Whatever the level, the group leader will have to relay the decision, explain its significance for the group, provide whatever documentation is necessary, and allow a sufficient time for questions. If the information is very important or complex, he should also see that the members of the group leave with a document to which they may refer to refresh their memories or to clarify some aspect of the project.

We have gone into detail on what may seem a routine aspect of management communication because the apparent simplicity of a communication situation is so frequently deceptive. Management often fails to consider carefully the potential impact of the information to be disseminated on employees at various levels. It seems obvious to say that department heads prefer to receive company information directly rather than from newspapers, the house organ, or the grapevine, but in too many companies information comes from such sources. A carefully planned meeting, on the other hand, insures that they get the information they need quickly and in detail, and it makes them feel that their roles are vital for implementing the decision. Furthermore, it insures that no employee leaves an information meeting with any misconception which can become the basis of harmful rumors. An information meeting is called partly to dispel any such misconceptions.

Sometimes the person in charge of an information or briefing session may lean too far in another direction—when he tries to avoid making it sound as though he is relaying a decision from above when that is exactly what he is doing. With all the current talk about teamwork, group decisions, and togetherness, management sometimes seems to feel that all its decisions should somehow appear to be the spontaneous consensus of a great big happy family. This sort of sleight of hand, of course, is really dishonest and seldom fools anyone. Management must make the decisions for which it is responsible. It should not try to appear "democratic" in situations in which it is not democratic or to make everyone in the company responsible for a decision which management alone has made.

Exploration Meetings

An important decision by top management often leads to another kind of group meeting, a meeting to explore the decision to see what it means to a particular division or department of the company. If, for example, company policy on overtime is altered, each division manager will need to sit down with his department heads to explore its implications for his division. Similarly department heads will want to consider the matter with their subordinates, some of whom may then need to study its ramifications with foremen under their jurisdiction. A similar need may occur if a division makes a proposal to top management—to purchase a license for a new product or to build a new plant, for example—and it comes back altered. The department heads will need to consider the nature of the change and its effect on their original plans.

Before calling an exploratory meeting, the person responsible should see that everyone involved has had an opportunity to examine the decision to determine how it will affect him and his staff. A group discussion to which the members come poorly prepared is simply a pooling of ignorance. As someone has said, two half wits do not make a wit.

Exploration meetings, in which action is contemplated, are often very useful. Instead of asking immediately "How do we solve our problem?" they pose the very important prior questions, "What *is* our problem?" or "Do we have a problem?" Too often people attempt to solve a problem before they know what it really is. Sitting down with the avowed purpose of exploring, rather than deciding, focuses their attention on the necessary first step of fruitful problem solving. Since they do not need to take immediate action, they are relieved of the dangerous temptation to take a position too early in the game which they will then feel committed to defend against all comers. Instead they may keep their thinking flexible until the appropriate time for reaching conclusions.

Problem-solving Meetings

In a third type of group discussion—probably the most widely used—the participants draw conclusions or make decisions. Faced with a problem, they must decide how to solve it. The resulting action may take many

forms. It may be, for example, a recommendation to the president or board of directors. It may be a set of regulations for the subordinates of some or all of the group's members. It may be a series of instructions for some or all of the members themselves.

Although our analysis has distinguished three distinct types of group meetings (the information meeting, the exploration meeting, and the problem-solving meeting), in actual practice a meeting may be a combination of two or even of all three types. It may begin as an information meeting and conclude as an exploration meeting. Or the order may be reversed if a group which meets to explore discovers that it does not have all of the necessary information. Sometimes such meetings must be adjourned until the necessary information can be provided. Or a group exploring a situation may discover it has a problem and what the problem is; then the meeting may become a decision meeting, where plans are made to solve the problem. A meeting may even start as an information meeting, shift to an exploration meeting, and then shift again to a decision meeting. The important point is that the leader of the meeting know what kind of meeting he is running at any particular moment. This knowledge will help him to keep the purpose of the meeting before the group and thus enable it to function efficiently.

Minutes

Whatever type of group session he runs, the discussion leader should arrange for someone to take minutes. Often the task may be assigned to a younger man who should be present but because of his inexperience will not have many comments to offer. If there is no such person in the group, the discussion leader may arrange for someone, probably a secretary, to attend the session specifically to take notes and write up minutes. The assignment should not be given to an active member of the group, for he cannot be expected to contribute effectively if he has to record what is happening.

The minutes of a meeting are very important. They should not attempt to cover everything that is said. Usually they should simply record the major points discussed, the conclusions reached, and, most important, everything that the group as a whole or a participant has agreed to do. Lengthy minutes take too long to prepare, require far too much checking,

are likely to cause unnecessary resentment on the part of those who think they have been misquoted, and will not be read by most members of the group. Brief minutes which summarize the group's progress in exploring or solving its problem will provide all that the members need for their files. Before minutes are sent out, they should, of course, be checked for accuracy and completeness by the chairman and by participants who have taken prominent parts in the discussion.

Promptness of distribution is most important, especially because minutes serve to remind individuals that they have agreed to undertake certain tasks. Minutes should be carefully organized, with materials clearly grouped for quick reference, and no significant item should be allowed to become lost in the middle or at the end of a paragraph. When minutes must be longer than a page, it is useful to type participants' names in capital letters whenever they appear in the text. In some companies a secretary underlines in red the name of the person to whom a particular copy of the minutes goes. However, such devices usually are necessary only because the minutes are cumbersome and poorly organized.

Case Study: A Well-run Meeting

At this point it may be useful to look in on a group discussion. The Southern Signal and Control Company manufactures railroad equipment. To be sure that it remains competitive, it has established a product-performance-analysis group, which gathers and analyzes reports on equipment failures. Every three months—or more often if the situation demands it—the head of product-performance-analysis discusses with the manager and staff of each operating department reports on the failure of equipment manufactured by that department. The reports themselves are distributed to the department staff a week before the meeting. The meeting is run by the manager, since he is responsible for the department. The head of product-performance-analysis is present to supply additional information and to help in evaluating the reports.

The meeting begins as an information meeting. At the invitation of the manager, the head of product-performance-analysis may summarize briefly the findings of his department. He may use charts or graphs to make his presentation more effective. If the problem is not serious, his report will be simple. If he feels that the problem is significant, he will probably

want to point it up by comparing the results of the past quarter with those of the three previous quarters or of the same quarter of the year before. The manager and the members of the department will then ask questions. The role of the manager during the question period is to see that everyone gets an opportunity to speak, that everyone is understood, and that the members of the group cooperate to elicit the necessary information rather than to place or avoid blame. The manager must also see that the group does not shift to problem-solving before he is satisfied that it has all the required information.

The manager will then want to shift the focus of the meeting. The facts are all out in the open. Is there any problem? If there have been an unusually large number of failures, he will immediately be faced with a difficult decision. Should he invite the product-performance head to stay, or thank him for his help and suggest that they need not take up any more of his time? An alert group leader will have anticipated this situation and thought it through in advance. Will the product-performance head have anything to contribute to the solution of the problem in hand? Does he usually get along well with the group, or does he irritate them? In meetings does he really try to help them solve their problem, or is he interested merely in placing the blame for the failure of their products? Is he always even tempered, or does he sometimes lose his patience? The manager who operates successful group meetings will not leave such important questions to be answered when he is distracted by other pressures. He will have thought them through before the meeting and reached a conclusion.

With or without the product-performance representative, the manager, functioning as the discussion leader, is ready to lead his group into an exploration session. It may be very brief: the number of failures for the quarter may be so small as to indicate that there is no real problem. On the other hand, if the number of failures has risen during the period, the group must consider whether it has a real problem on its hands or whether exceptional circumstances beyond its control have caused the rise. If the group concludes that it has a problem, it must then decide what to do about it. It is here that the success or failure of the department may depend on the manager's ability as a discussion leader. If the group makes wise decisions under his guidance, the meeting will be profitable. If he allows the members of the group to dissipate their energies and abilities in wrangling over minor points, the meeting will be worse than useless.

As in most companies today, decisions at S. S. & C. are not simply made by the manager and handed to subordinates for implementation. Some com-

panies are still run by fiat, but they pay a high price. They deprive themselves both of the experience and ideas of subordinates, and of the opportunity to train subordinates in the operations of the company so that they will be able intelligently to assume increasing responsibility. The wise manager will consider very carefully, therefore, which matters he must act on personally, which he should delegate, and which he should submit for group deliberation. Having decided, he must let his subordinates know to what extent he wants them to assume responsibility in decision-making.

Group Discussion and Leadership Training

We know of a small company in which lack of such communications interfered seriously with the company's operation. A new president and his executive vice president agreed that the company would profit if their department heads were given more independence and were encouraged to take a greater interest in the over-all operation of the company. Instead of being explicit about the change in their policy, however, they simply tried to give the department heads an opportunity to act on their own initiative. But the department heads, accustomed to tighter control, interpreted the apparent passivity of top management as lack of leadership. Group meetings ended in frustration for all concerned. The president felt that the department heads lacked initiative and the capacity for independent, creative thinking. The department heads complained that after a meeting with the president they could not understand what he wanted them to do. A management consultant who was called in sized up the situation and explained to the department heads what the president wanted. When he had finished, one of them spoke up with considerable irritation: "Then why the devil didn't he say so?"

An intelligent executive realizes that an important aspect of his job is training. He knows that in the day-to-day routine of running his company or department he can help his subordinates learn what they need in order to grow. Thus he can provide a continuous procession of capable employees for the company.

A supervisor has a double task, then, in running a problem-solving session: to lead the group in solving the problem and to help the individuals in the group and the group as a whole to grow. As a leader—or teacher, or coach—he should liberate and develop the creative abilities of his staff

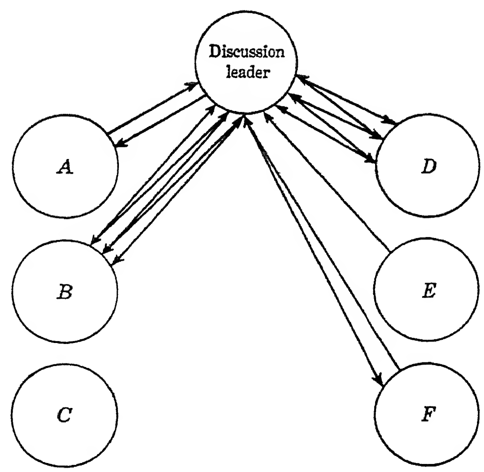
members so that they will become increasingly more capable of individual responsibility and action and less dependent on him. By telling his subordinates exactly what to do at all times, he can do no more than develop poor reproductions of himself. Furthermore, such rigid control frustrates and restricts them, causes them to become narrow and inflexible, to do things as they have always been done, to distrust their own ideas and abilities, and to rely heavily on other people for instructions and support. A company full of such people has no vitality and soon ceases to be competitive.

Research has shown that group discussions are also useful in another way. Making changes through group decision instead of by issuing orders is a very effective method of avoiding resistance to change. Employees accept much more readily those goals which are arrived at by group decision.

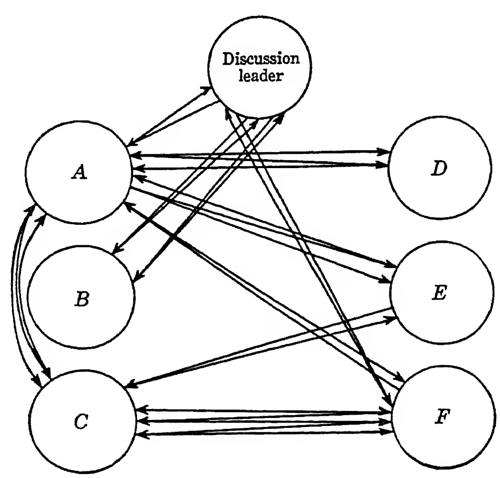
A supervisor who wants to develop his subordinates must function as a discussion *leader* in group conferences. He must maintain what psychologists call a "permissive" atmosphere. The members of the group should be encouraged to express their ideas. They should not feel that the group leader or their colleagues are sitting in judgment or that they will be criticized or belittled. They must feel instead that their remarks will be treated with genuine respect and consideration.

Charting the Flow of Ideas

A device known as the sociogram, which charts the exchange of ideas among group members, has been used to determine to what extent a leader has been able to stimulate real group discussion. The figure below, for example, is a sociogram of a brief meeting. Each arrow indicates the source and direction of a single comment. Notice that each exchange of remarks was between the discussion leader and a member of the group. No discussion was directed across the table. Furthermore, only the discussion leader and two of the participants said very much. *A* and *F* each had one exchange with the leader; *E* made one comment to him, which evidently warranted no reply; and *C* said absolutely nothing. This then was not a group discussion, but rather a series of exchanges between the leader and a few of his subordinates.



Below is the chart of another meeting. It presents an entirely different picture. Here the discussion leader did relatively little talking and every member of the group had something to say. *B* was drawn into the discussion twice by the group leader. *A* and *F* both did quite a bit of talking; and since they spoke only once to each other, it would seem that each assumed leadership during a different portion of the meeting.*



* The discussion leader should not try to construct a sociogram while a meeting is going on. He may ask an observer (who is not sitting at the table) to make one, or if the meeting can be put on tape, he may construct one afterward. If members of the group are continually reminded that a sociogram is being made, they are not likely to contribute as freely as they normally would.

The Role of the Discussion Leader

The sociogram, of course, merely charts one aspect of a conference: who talked with whom. It does not show how much of the discussion was profitable, nor does it indicate the tone of the conference. Throughout a meeting, the discussion leader must carefully control both content and tone. He must see to it, for example, that the remarks focus on the topic. He should promptly head off any pronounced tendency toward irrelevancy: "That's an interesting sidelight, Jim. Now about George's comment that we dare not raise prices now, do you think that . . ." or, "Jim, that's something that we ought to talk over some time. Why don't you see me when we're through here and we'll discuss the advisability of scheduling a meeting just on that problem." It is possible, of course, to be too ruthless in repressing *brief* remarks that give the participants a chance to relax momentarily: a quick joke, a pun, reference to a humorous situation which everyone knows. Discussions that rigidly adhere to the topic often become grim. A group functions better if it can relax now and then.

The discussion leader can be helpful in other ways. If someone makes a remark which the group does not understand, he can clarify it quickly by asking, "Then you agree with George, John?" or "Are you suggesting a new approach, John?" Such remarks indicate to the previous speaker that what he said was not clear and head off possible embarrassing remarks by sharp-tongued participants.

One of the discussion leader's major responsibilities is watching for and heading off heated conflicts. If one participant replies angrily or disparagingly to another, he must point out quickly that the offender should mend his ways: "Paul is entitled to his opinion, Fred," or "Getting angry isn't going to solve our problem, Fred," or even "Let's save the heat for next winter, Fred." Should a meeting break into wrangling despite his efforts, his best course is to announce, "We're not getting anywhere. Let's recess until after lunch to give you people a chance to cool off."

Bullying, sarcasm, anger—all can disrupt a profitable discussion. The competent discussion leader tactfully rules such comments out of order. If he persists in maintaining an atmosphere in which each member is free to speak without fear of attack, his group may accomplish a great deal. To be successful, however, he must constantly be alert to undercurrents in the discussion. In speaking as in writing, *how* one says something is as important as *what* he says.

A discussion leader who attempts to put these principles into practice should not be disheartened if he is not immediately successful. A new ninth-grade teacher recently learned this lesson the hard way. Imbued with democratic principles of education, she resolved to use the discussion method of teaching as her primary tool. Early in the term, she assigned a short story for the class to read. The next day she opened the class period by asking, "Well, did you like the story you read for today?" Silence. She rephrased the question. Still not a word. When she put it to the class in a third form, they began to get restless. Other questions also failed dismally, and she almost lost control of the class.

Disheartened, she consulted a friend who was an experienced teacher. What was wrong? She was using the method recommended by the best books on educational psychology. She had seen it work for other people. Why didn't it work for her?

At the suggestion of the experienced teacher she did some research on the previous classroom experience of her students. The eighth-grade teacher had handled reading lessons in a standard way. When she assigned a story, she gave the students eight or ten questions for which they were to write the answers. Each question required a summary of some portion of the story. In class the next day, she called on three students to read their answer to the first question. Then *she* discussed the three answers briefly and announced which was the best. She went through the same procedure for each question. By the time she had finished with the last question, the end of the period had arrived. The seventh-grade teacher had used much the same method.

The new ninth-grade teacher now realized why she had failed so completely to involve her students in group discussion. They did not have the vaguest notion what she expected of them. Accustomed to a thoughtless, unimaginative routine, they were either frightened or embarrassed when suddenly faced with unexpected freedom and responsibility. After further discussions with her friend, she decided to try a more gradual approach. The next time she assigned a short story she asked the students to write the answers to eight or ten factual questions. The following day she asked three students to read their answers to the first question. Then she invited the *class* to discuss the answers. Faced with the smaller job of comparing three specific statements, members of the class hazarded a few short remarks. Because she knew that they would be uneasy if she did not tell them what she thought, she pulled their remarks together and added a few of her own. She continued with the other questions in the same way.

As the weeks passed, the questions became less factual and more interpretive. Class discussions similarly encouraged the students to do their own thinking and make their own judgments on the stories they read. The process took many months, but the teacher eventually was able to hold stimulating and productive discussion sessions.

This episode, apparently so far removed from business and industry, may be very instructive. It demonstrates clearly an important principle: groups must mature, learn to think for themselves, and accept responsibility slowly, just as individuals do. The sink-or-swim technique can lead only to utter failure whether it is tried with a group of businessmen or with ninth-grade students. If a group of adults, however capable in other ways, have been accustomed to obeying orders or following procedures established by their superiors, they must be helped—at whatever rate they can accommodate—to accept the responsibility of thinking for themselves. If a supervisor or a teacher forces them to sit around a table and lets it be known that he expects them to communicate freely with each other, he will only stimulate a variety of aggressive reactions and destroy any possibility of successful group discussions in the future. A supervisor who sincerely wants to train his people to think for themselves and work as a team will have to be as realistic as the ninth-grade teacher was. He will help his subordinates develop at the rate best suited to them.

Obviously, few supervisors will run into as difficult a situation as our school teacher. Many subordinates can participate in group discussions efficiently and effectively. But each discussion leader should study his group with great care in order to determine how well it is equipped to carry on a profitable discussion.

The Role of the Participant

To give this chapter focus, we have considered the problems of group discussion from the viewpoint of the discussion leader. But everything that we have said has obvious implications for the other members of the group. Just as the group leader should prepare himself for the meeting, so should the participants. Each should read carefully any material sent to him in advance of the meeting and be prepared to talk about it or use it at the appropriate time in the discussion. He should think carefully about the meeting: what its purpose is, what he hopes to learn from it, how he can best contribute to it, who will be at the meeting and how they will be likely

to react. He should also gather whatever material he will need to function effectively in the meeting: reports, statistics, letters, and memos. A participant who expects to speak at any length or to make a particular point will also want to prepare a brief set of notes to take with him.

In the meeting, the participants should feel as responsible for its success as the group leader. Each should stick to the topic, avoid giving personal affront, listen carefully and courteously, contribute when he should, and keep his remarks as brief as possible. He may also want to take brief notes to serve until the minutes are available.

When each participant leaves the meeting, he should take a few moments to consider the implications it has had for him. Did it resolve the matter under consideration? Had he promised to do something? Did decisions reached at the meeting have any consequences for him which were not explicitly brought out? When he receives the minutes, he should examine them carefully to be sure that they report the meeting as he remembered it. If he finds a discrepancy, he should consider whether correction can wait until the next meeting or should be made at once; and he should act accordingly. He should also make a note of any specific assignment he agreed to undertake and carry it out as soon as possible. Finally, he should see that the minutes are filed where he can find them when he wants them.

Barriers to Effective Group Discussion

The late Irving J. Lee of Northwestern University spent several years studying group discussion in industry. He concluded that "it was not enough merely to encourage people to talk *to* others. They needed to know how to talk *with* others, too."* Dr. Lee's research showed that men fail to communicate with each other in the conference and committee room for many reasons.

1. Too many people assume that everyone uses words exactly as they do. Instead of waiting to make sure that they understand what a person has said or asking him to define his terms, they assume, quite innocently, that their first impression is correct and proceed to confuse the group's thinking.
2. The situation is even worse when one conference participant contradicts another without really understanding him. Since there is no

* Irving J. Lee, *How to Talk with People* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952), p. xi.

real communication, each participant thinks immediately that the other is stupid, and tempers flare quickly.

3. People often fail to realize that honest men can honestly disagree. So, convinced of the validity of their own point of view, they fail to realize that anyone can honestly hold another.
4. People unwittingly encourage disagreement by trying to solve a problem before they examine it.
5. Even after they have explored a problem together, participants in a group discussion may not see it in the same way. Some feel that the problem resembles one they recently solved; others, that it is completely different.
6. Too many people feel that a willingness to compromise indicates a lack of integrity: "What's right is right!"
7. The use of labels keeps people from thinking clearly: "What else would you expect of a union leader?" or "The question is who's running this outfit? Who's the boss?"
8. People sometimes interpret strong disagreement as a personal attack.
9. Anger usually generates more anger. When one participant in a group discussion loses his temper, others may be expected to follow suit.
10. If no one gives the impression that he "knows it all," the chances of real cooperation are good.
11. A group leader may be tempted to "keep the group operating more efficiently" by thinking for them. Usually it is wiser to postpone decision on a disputed issue than to force one at the moment.
12. Group members sometimes accept a solution to a problem in order to avoid a quarrel or to save time—a procedure which merely postpones or compounds difficulties instead of removing them.
13. Too frequently discussion leaders are so intent on the group's "efficiency" that they reduce the group's effectiveness by exerting strong pressure to move along.
14. Many leaders try to fulfill too many key roles in a group discussion. Responsibility for many aspects of running the group (calling meetings, providing background information, taking minutes, and so on) can be delegated.*

Dr. Lee has listed so many barriers to effective group discussion that the reader may feel that it can never be achieved. His experiences and the

* The main points in Chapter 1 of Dr. Lee's *How to Talk with People* have been summarized here. We recommend a closer examination of the book.

experiences of many other people, however, have proved otherwise. In this chapter and in Chapters 2 and 10, we have listed many of the concepts necessary to avoid or remove these barriers. Studying them carefully, and consciously attempting to use them, will help one to be an effective discussion leader.*

Illustrative Materials

1

Here is a check list for group discussion. Reading it occasionally, especially before going to a meeting or conference, will help you to participate in and lead discussions more effectively.

1. Before attempting to communicate, put yourself in the other fellow's shoes. Consider the impact on the group of what you will say. (See Chapter 2.)
2. When speaking, remember that:
   a. Union leader$_1$ is not union leader$_2$; group member$_1$ is not group member$_2$ is not group member$_3$.
   b. Union leader$_{1933}$ is not union leader$_{1958}$; South American customer$_{1940}$ is not South American customer$_{1958}$.
   c. Things are not either/or, black or white, right or wrong; they are generally somewhere in between.
   d. Words are only symbols for things and should not be treated as things. (See Chapter 10.)
3. Before attempting to communicate, remember to:
   a. Move down the abstraction ladder when you define your terms.
   b. Distinguish between facts and inferences.
   c. Avoid the tendency to think in stereotypes; instead of thinking in terms of *all,* think in terms of *some, many,* or *most.* (See Chapter 10.)
4. As a discussion leader you should:
   a. Plan the meeting in advance.
   b. Distinguish between information meetings, exploration meetings, and decision meetings; and help the participants to understand both your role and theirs in each.

* These concepts are summarized in a check list in the Illustrative Materials following.

c. Make sure that the participants understand the extent of their responsibility for the success of the meeting.
d. Pass along management's decisions and state your own decisions as decisions; do not try to pretend that the group is to reach decisions democratically if in fact they have already been made and are merely being passed on.
e. See that information which takes considerable time to digest gets to the members of the group long enough in advance of the meeting for them to master it.
f. Use members of the group and people outside of it to help the group function efficiently: to provide information, call meetings, clarify terms, take minutes, and so on.
g. See that participants understand each other as thoroughly as possible.
h. Encourage honest compromise.
i. Discourage yielding simply to avoid argument.
j. Serve as a discussion leader and not as a whip.
k. Help the individuals in the group and the group as a whole to participate in the discussion and accept responsibility for group problem solving at the rate best suited to their stage of development and to their ability to learn.

2

Take this list with you to the next meeting you attend. See how many of the types described below you can identify in the group*:

The Confused Listener: He tries to be helpful but can't follow the proceedings. He rises to say there's a motion before the house; and has to be told it was rejected half an hour ago. He has a habit of sitting in the last row and complaining he can't hear. Throughout he carries an outraged attitude of "Why don't people tell me these things?"

The Professional Seconder: He never thinks up an idea, and is so overwhelmed when someone else does that he comes in with a loud "second the motion." Any nonsensical scheme anyone can think up gets his nod. He then settles back to enjoy the confusion or dozes until time for him to chime in with another second.

The Willing Voter: He takes little part in business but votes in a loud

* From the *Maryland Labor Press.*

voice. He is always eager to swell the vote of the prevailing side. A dangerous yes-man.

Behind-the-hand Mutterer: He fumes, fidgets, mutters to his neighbor, but seldom takes the floor to speak. If you sit beside him, you will miss hearing the most important points of the meeting. He votes no consistently and mutters, "What can you do in a mess like this?"

Explode-at-the-door Man: He sits quietly through the meeting as if everything were to his liking, but at the door he boils over. You hear him say, as he rounds up a few discontented members, "Are you going to stand for that?"

"We-always-do-it-this-way" Member: He is a traditionalist, forever looking over his shoulder. The old way is the only way. If a change of any kind is suggested, or a new idea brought forth, he fears the new officers are leading up to ruin.

Super-parliamentarian: He knows all the rules when they are not needed. But when you run into difficulty, and call upon him for advice, he has forgotten the rule book.

Stay-away Member: Meetings bore him. He has his own way of wasting time. Besides he doesn't want to feel responsible for anything that happens. The blood is not on his hands if he didn't go to the meeting.

The Obstructionist: He delights in tying the meeting into knots. Anything he can do to make the meeting so long or unpleasant that members will stay away next time, he will gladly do. He may work with henchmen to wear down the membership so that his gang can take over.

Pre-meeting Specialist: Before the meeting is held, he explains just what should be done. He is still going strong at 1:30 but by meeting time he is exhausted and has to be guided home.

3

Enlightened management has always been concerned about the need to keep employees informed. The following statement was prepared in 1951.

The ever-present need for improving operating efficiency has, over the last two or three years, led most General Electric managers to seek more effective means of making their leadership felt at all levels throughout their organization. Many have turned to the techniques of intensive communication to accomplish this purpose, and found them surprisingly effective as a means of integrating and motivating their management teams, developing

their supervisors as real leaders of their people, building employee confidence in top management and inspiring employees to put forth greater skill, care, and effort in furthering the objectives of the business. In one department after another, intensive communication programs are paying big dividends in developing more favorable attitudes, increasing efficiency, reducing waste and spoilage, decreasing turnover and absenteeism, raising output, improving safety records, stimulating suggestions, and improving profit performance in many ways.*

a. *Does intensive communication mean lecturing to employees?*
b. *What form of communication will help supervisors to become "real leaders of their people"?*
c. *How does communication build employee confidence in top management?*
d. *Why should the kind of communication discussed in this chapter result in* (1) *decreased turnover and absenteeism?* (2) *more suggestions from employees?* (3) *increased efficiency?*

4

Evaluating the performance of a discussion leader is profitable for both the leader and the evaluator. The leader receives suggestions about how he can improve, and the evaluator learns from having to watch and listen critically and from analyzing the performance of another. The Barnlund-Haiman Leader Rating Scale was developed for this purpose. While the scale is intended as a tool for the trained observer, it is instructive for anyone interested in evaluating leadership performance to go over it carefully.

Barnlund-Haiman Leader Rating Scale†

INITIATING DISCUSSION

3	2	1	0	1	2	3
Group needed more help in getting started			Group got right amount of help in getting started			Group needed less help in getting started

* *Employee Communication* (Executive Summary), Employee and Plant Community Relations Services Division (New York: General Electric Corporation, 1951), Foreword.

† From Franklyn S. Haiman, *Group Leadership and Democratic Action* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1951), pp. 237–243.

The quality of the leader's introductory remarks was:

Excellent	Good	Adequate	Fair	Poor

CLIMATE-MAKING

3	2	1	0	1	2	3
Group needed more help in securing a frank, permissive atmosphere			Group got right amount of help in securing a frank, permissive atmosphere			Group needed less help in securing a frank, permissive atmosphere

With regard to the establishment and maintenance of a frank and permissive atmosphere the leader's behavior was:

Excellent	Good	Adequate	Fair	Poor

REGULATING AMOUNT OF PARTICIPATION

3	2	1	0	1	2	3
Group needed more regulation of participation			Group got right amount of regulation of participation			Group needed less regulation of participation

If and when the leader attempted to regulate participation, his method was:

Excellent	Good	Adequate	Fair	Poor

STIMULATING GROUP THINKING

3	2	1	0	1	2	3
Group needed more stimulation			Group got right amount of stimulation			Group needed less stimulation

If and when the leader attempted to stimulate group thinking, his method was:

Excellent	Good	Adequate	Fair	Poor

DIRECTING GROUP THINKING

3	2	1	0	1	2	3
Group needed more direction in thinking			Group got right amount of direction in thinking			Group needed less direction in thinking

If and when the leader attempted to direct group thinking his method was:

Excellent	Good	Adequate	Fair	Poor

SUMMARIZING

3	2	1	0	1	2	3
Group needed more summaries			Group got right amount of summaries			Group needed fewer summaries

If and when the leader provided summaries, his method was:

Excellent	Good	Adequate	Fair	Poor

RESOLVING CONFLICT

3	2	1	0	1	2	3
Group needed more help in resolving its conflicts			Group got right amount of help in resolving its conflicts			Group needed less help in resolving its conflicts

If and when the leader attempted to help resolve conflict, his method was:

Excellent	Good	Adequate	Fair	Poor

OVER-ALL LEADERSHIP ABILITY

3	2	1	0	1	2	3
Group needed more control			Group got right amount of control			Group needed less control

If and when the leader attempted to control the group, the general quality of his leadership was:

Excellent	Good	Adequate	Fair	Poor

Instructions for Use of the Barnlund-Haiman Rating Scale

This rating scale is designed for use by *trained observers* in evaluating discussion leaders. Its reliability is dependent upon the extent to which observers understand and agree upon the assumptions and criteria set forth in these instructions.

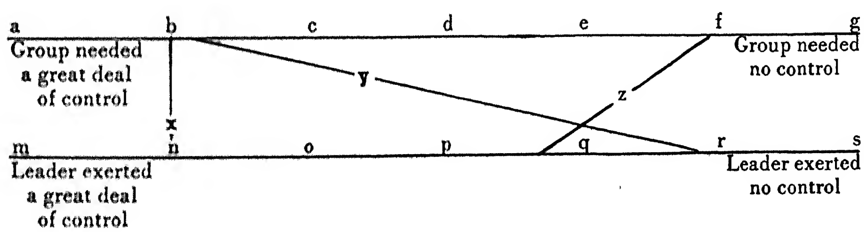
We start with two basic assumptions:

1. Discussion leadership can be evaluated properly only when a number of situational factors are taken into consideration. Some of these factors are:
   a. The purpose of the group
   b. The nature of the problem which confronts the group
   c. The maturity of the group
   d. The amount of time available to the group
2. Ideally, pure democratic leadership is the best. It should be sacrificed in favor of autocratic methods only to the degree demanded by the situational factors referred to above.

Our rating scale is designed to take these situational factors into account. It is constructed so that a leader who is observed at different times may receive very different ratings for the same behavior because situational factors have changed.

The observer is asked to make two judgments on each of eight leadership functions.

The first judgment is intended to reveal whether or not the leader was sensitive to the needs of the group and attempted to respond to those needs. It is thus a *ratio between the amount of help or control needed by the group and the amount supplied by the leader.* A diagram may help to clarify this concept:



If the group observed is at point "a" on the continuum and the leader is at point "m," we may say that the group got just the right amount of control. This would also be true if the group needed no control (point "g") and got none (point "s"). In short, if a line drawn between any two appro-

priate points on these continua is perpendicular (such as "x"), the rating scale should be marked at "right amount" thus:

			x			
3	2	1	0	1	2	3
Group needed more . . .			Group got right amount of . . .			Group needed less . . .

If the line is not perpendicular, the rating scale will be marked somewhere to the right or left of "right amount." For example, if the group is at point "b" and the leader at point "r" (line "y"), the rating scale would be marked almost to the extreme left—"group needed more. . . ." If the group is at "f" and the leader at "s," the rating scale would be marked only slightly to the left of center. Whenever the upper end of the line is to the left of the lower end (such as line "y") the rating scale will be marked somewhere to the left of center. Whenever the upper end of the line is to the right of the lower end (such as line "z") the rating scale will be marked somewhere to the right of center.*

The second judgment that the observer is asked to make on each of the eight leadership functions concerns the quality of the leader's methods. Whereas the first judgment simply reflects the leader's awareness of a need as shown by his efforts to provide help, the second judgment concerns the skill with which those efforts are made. Although these two matters are closely interrelated, and the two judgments will sometimes influence each other a great deal, there seems to be considerable merit in attempting to distinguish between them.

In those cases where the leader did nothing in a particular category the observer should ignore the second rating scale for that category.

This rating scale is concerned with eight specific leadership functions. It was believed that this particular classification would be the most useful for helping to train group leaders.

In order to develop a high degree of reliability for the scale, it is essential that uniform standards of judgment be developed among the observers with respect to each of the eight functions. We cannot hope to accomplish that end in these instructions. We can only provide a brief

* It should be mentioned, in passing, that when the group is at point "g" and the leader at point "s" and the resultant rating is "right amount," there is no way for the observer to know whether the leader's abstinence was due to sensitivity to the needs of the group or to default. This limitation can be overcome only by intuition on the observer's part or by repeated observations of the same leader in a variety of settings.

description of each category and refer the observer to the textbook material for further elaboration.

INITIATING DISCUSSION

This category pertains to the opening of the meeting only. It concerns the way in which the problem or the purpose of the meeting is stated and the way in which discussion is started.

CLIMATE-MAKING

We are concerned here with the establishment of an atmosphere which:

a. Encourages frankness on the part of the group members. Enables them to state their ideas, convictions and feelings with honesty. Is free from artificiality.

b. Is permissive. Provides psychological freedom for the members. Is free from overdomination or pressure by the leader or by any other member. Encourages objectivity in dealing with the feelings of group members.

REGULATING AMOUNT OF PARTICIPATION

This function has to do with the problem of achieving a healthy balance among members in their quantity of participation. It does not require that everyone participate equally, but that there is equality of *opportunity to participate.* It enables the group to make the most effective use of its own human resources—drawing on all the worthwhile talents that are available, and protecting the group from undue monopolizing of the conversation.

STIMULATING GROUP THINKING

This category includes such matters as bringing the problem close to the group, obtaining emotional involvement, helping the group to consider all angles, making the abstract concrete, playing the devil's advocate—in short, motivating the thinking processes.

DIRECTING GROUP THINKING

In order to solve problems effectively some measure of discipline must prevail in our thinking processes. Digressions must be kept to a minimum. Tangents and irrelevancies must be reduced. Some kind of systematic procedure or logical method must be followed.

SUMMARIZING

This refers to the pulling together of loose ends. It includes reporting what the group has done (what ground has been covered), and/or re-emphasizing important points that have been made.

RESOLVING CONFLICT

Into this category fall all efforts to reconcile differences. This includes such sub-headings as exploring the differences, clarifying areas of agreement and disagreement, and reducing extrinsic conflict.

OVER-ALL LEADERSHIP ABILITY

We are concerned here with the total impact of the leader on the group. Weighing all factors (both on and off the rating scale) and placing them in perspective, how good a job did the leader do?

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